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BLANCH AND ARMAND.

TITANIA:
TALES AND LEGENDS,

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN OF

AUGUSTE LINDEN,

BY



Trauermantel.

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TO

MAGGIE AND MINNIE,

TWO LITTLE, GENTLE, LOVING, TWIN SPIRITS,

THIS VOLUME IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED,

BY

THE TRANSLATOR.

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THE PAGE.

A TALE.

CHAPTER I.

BLANCHE AND ARMAND.

AT a short distance from Paris lies a charming valley, whose green, velvety meadows are watered by a little silver brook. The murmuring waves dance gayly over the white pebble-stones, and the stream is so transparent that the roots of the grasses and water-lilies springing from its bed can plainly be distinguished.

The valley is narrow, and enclosed by a ridge of green hills, which, however, open towards the south, and admit a more extended prospect. At this southern extremity the brook formerly meandered through a pretty village, with neat, white houses, each surrounded by a well-kept garden of flowers, vegetables, or fruit.

At the end of the village, apart from the rest, stood a somewhat larger dwelling. It was a simple but cheerful country-house, whose owner, M. de Saint-Almé, had formerly lived in Paris, but had removed thence, and at the time of our story dwelt with his family in great retirement at the cottage.

At one extremity of the simple flower-garden encircling M. de Saint-Almé's dwelling, rose a close avenue of lofty beech-trees leading to the main entrance of a massive building of gray stone. This edifice, or castle, was built in the old style; the grass growing between the stones paving the court-yard gave evidence that no cheerful or order-loving spirit here presided over the niceties of external appearance.

This was indeed the case. Count Roger de Clairville, an old knight who had won his spurs under King Henry the Fourth, had here, during many years, led a solitary and secluded life. Count Roger had loved no one except his king, Henry, and after the death of his idol, feeling no affection towards the next in succession, Louis, he retired to his family seat, where he lived in utter solitude, almost forgot-

ten by a world in which he no longer felt the least interest.

His dark locks had grown gray, his knightly spurs were rusty, and his features, once handsome and winning, had become hard, stern, and angular. His manners had lost their grace, and his heart its warmth. In this solitude he forgot all except himself and his lost sovereign; even a nephew whom he had once fondly loved as a charming and engaging child was no longer remembered.

The Count's sorrow was not then very profound when he received a letter sealed with black, announcing this nephew's death, and furthermore containing a request that he would adopt the nephew's orphan son. This was a most unexpected and unwelcome proposition, for since the Count was himself a boy, no child had been seen in the castle, nor had the silence of the lonely halls been broken by the cheerful echoes of a glad young voice.

But there was no way of avoiding this accession to the family. A few weeks passed, and the Count's great nephew, Armand Clairville, then thirteen years of age, arrived at the

castle. The bold, active, and lively boy gazed in astonishment upon his cold, stiff uncle, and the grimness of all surrounding him ; the very furniture seemed made rather to repel than to invite !

Armand soon began to find Clairville Hall indescribably dull and desolate ; he made various excursions into the neighborhood, and quite naturally found his way to M. de Saint-Almé's house.

Let us accompany him thither upon one of his many visits.

The clock had struck two in the afternoon, and the sun shone bright and warm through the thick branches of the beech avenue, as Armand hastened down its almost untrodden sidewalk with rapid steps and eager glances.

Armand was a handsome boy, with fine features, a noble bearing, and easy, pleasing manners. Gayety and light-heartedness shone out from the dark eyes, which were nevertheless filled with intelligence and spirit, while the curling upper lip of the finely chiselled mouth betrayed the fact that pride and self-will were by no means unknown to the boy.

He soon reached Saint-Almé's house, and stepped lightly into the flower-garden, in one corner of which stood an arbor covered with the crimson blossoms of the flowering bean. He hastened thither.

Under the blooming vines sat a little girl of about twelve years old. The trellis, with its glowing crimson and green arabesques, formed a graceful frame in which was set the lovely image of the child, who, with her simple white dress, and blonde curls confined by a blue ribbon, was really charming to look upon.

She did not perceive Armand, for he glided over the gravel walk with noiseless steps. At length he stood behind her, and, laying his hand upon her eyes, said in a feigned voice, with a great effort to attain an unfathomable bass: "Can you guess, Miss Saint-Almé, who stands behind you?"

"O it can be no one but the proud lord of Clairville Hall!" cried she. "That will do, Armand. I knew you at once, in spite of your deep voice."

"You must be a little fairy, Blanche, or

you never could have guessed," laughed Armand.

"Hush! hush!" replied Blanche, warningly raising her forefinger, "you must not speak of fairies or magic, my friend; do you not know that even under King Charles the Seventh, all were burned alive who were suspected of being witches and magicians?"

"Yes, but, my pretty little lady, King Louis the Fourteenth, a very wise and enlightened prince, rules the land in these days; and besides, Blanche, you do not look the least like a witch."

Blanche cast her eyes over her pretty little figure, and then turned them with a satisfied glance towards her friend, who laughed aloud as he followed their direction.

"Well, really, I cannot see what you find to laugh at so incessantly, Armand," said the child, feeling somewhat hurt at the boy's exaggerated gayety.

"I only laugh for joy on your account, and because I am so well pleased with you to-day; but I must think a wreath of forget-me-nots would be much more becoming than that faded

blue ribbon. Come, let us go to the meadow and twine a garland of the lovely blue star-flowers; you know where they grow, beside the brook."

Blanche put on her straw hat and willingly followed. The children soon reached the brook, gathered the flowers, and seated themselves on the grassy bank to weave them into garlands.

"Do you know," said Blanche, confidentially, "that I really cannot understand how you manage to live up there at the castle; you must surely see more bats and owls than human beings?"

"You are quite right, Blanche, and I often feel dreadfully melancholy when I walk up and down the vast halls, with all the portraits of the old counts and knights staring down upon me, and the sound of my own footsteps echoing hollowly after me as they fall upon the stone pavement of the floors. B-r-r-r! — I often shudder with horror when I hear nothing but the screeching of owls; and when the harsh croaking of the chattering daws is the only reply I can win to the sound of my own voice."

“But how can your uncle live in such a desolate place?”

“O very well! He chose it of his own free will. My father often told me how Count Roger was once as lively and gay-hearted as any of us; but after King Henry’s death he suddenly became serious and melancholy, and soon after chose this solitary life.”

“But it is really cruel in the Count to suffer your life to be so lonely and joyless,” continued Blanche. “He adopted you of his own free will, and he ought to see that you are happy.”

“Not quite of his own free will,” replied Armand, seriously, “and it is just that which troubles me. When my father was dying, he begged the Count to adopt me, which he did, — but I can plainly see that he does not love me.”

“Is he then harsh to you, my good Armand?”

“O no, not harsh! but he cares nothing at all about me. He scarcely replies to my salutations when we meet, he never laughs with me, and I am never expected to talk where he

is, or relate to him any of my little adventures, or the feelings which every one who is young and lively must desire to communicate. And what is worse than all, he lets me learn nothing, and never gives me a friendly look."

"Ah! that is very bad, not to let you learn anything," replied Blanche, solemnly, "for I really think you know very little!"

Armand blushed, and said in a low tone: "When I was at Brienne, I was quite an industrious scholar; but I should dearly love to ride, fight, and dance well, and of those three things I am very ignorant."

"You would like to be a soldier then?"

Armand's eyes glistened as he said, in an excited tone: "Ha! when I even think of it, my heart beats with joy and desire! O Blanche, just fancy me at King Louis's court, a bold knight, courageous and dauntless as his Majesty himself! Only think of a tournament in honor of the queen's birthday; the ladies in waving plumes and dazzling jewels lean over the balcony and look down upon the noble lords and knights who are about to combat in their honor! O, I can imagine it all so vividly!

I can see you, a beautiful lady in a light blue dress, with blue ribbons in your hair, sitting on the balcony, while I enter the lists on my black Arabian steed. I wear your colors, scarf and plume of heaven's own hue, and stand ready to combat with the proudest knight of them all! The strife begins, blow follows blow; the struggle is hard, but the adversary gives way,— I grow more impetuous, and finally see him fall. I spring from my steed, and while the clang of the trumpets announces my victory, I loose my enemy's helmet as he kneels for mercy at my feet. Then Blanche, I hasten to you, I humbly lower my lance, and you crown me with a laurel-wreath, in token of your favor and my victory!"

Blanche looked half bewildered as she gazed upon the excited countenance of the enthusiastic boy, who had so suddenly admitted her into the secrets of his lofty and ambitious dreams; but when he ceased to speak, she sadly shook her head and said: "O do not wish to be at King Louis's court: it is not well to be there!"

The boy looked astonished.

“ You see,” she continued, in a mysterious and confidential manner, “ we were very unhappy in Paris. My father was an officer in the king’s life-guards, and he and mamma were very often with the king and queen. But they had one bitter enemy, the Marquis de Maine, who slandered my father to his Majesty, for he said my father had entered into engagements with England and Holland prejudicial to King Louis’s interests. I do not understand much about it, but I do know that papa lost the king’s favor, and was forced to leave Paris very hastily. Now you see, Armand, why he is so sad and quiet, and never seems cheerful and merry, although mamma does all she can to render him happy. And for that reason she never complains, although forced to renounce, within the little rooms and bare walls of our cottage, all that she was accustomed to see around her in Paris. Ah! there we had a beautiful palace, with splendid halls hung with embroidered tapestry! O, everything was so magnificent!”

“ Poor Blanche! and now you must give it all up!” cried Armand, sympathizingly.

“O, I do not care much, for the narrow streets in Paris do not please me half so well as these meadows and our flower-garden. Indeed, I would much prefer remaining here, if my father’s reputation were only vindicated; for I heard him say very lately, ‘Believe me, Margery,’ — that is what he calls mamma, — ‘I would willingly renounce honor, glory, and wealth, if my king were only convinced of my innocence; but that he, my benefactor, must think me false and ungrateful, is to me a cause of the most poignant and incurable sorrow.’”

“But why did the Marquis de Maine slander your father?”

“I do not understand that precisely, but I think it was somehow this way: King Louis had made an agreement with the Netherlands, of which King Charles of England was to know nothing; but it suddenly came out that some one had betrayed his Majesty’s plans to the English king, and my father was accused of having been the traitor. Only a few days since, I heard papa say, ‘I believe that De Maine was the real traitor, and that he accused me in order to screen himself.’”

“But your father can prove that to the king!” cried Armand, eagerly.

“What are you dreaming of? It is only a suspicion; he has no proofs, and the Marquis de Maine is too cunning to be found off his guard.”

“Ah, good Blanche, that is very sad!”

“You see now how it is at court, and you should not wish to be there.”

“Do not be vexed with me, but indeed I cannot help longing to go. O how glorious Paris must be!”

“Were you never there, Armand?”

“Only once, during a few days. A distant relative of my dear mother lives quite near the Louvre. O how charming it was to look out of the windows and see the fine knights and ladies! But although I am a baron’s son, I could never be presented to the king, because I am poor and friendless; and Count Roger will surely never think of taking me to Paris: he will let me live and die in this desert!”

“And do you feel very unhappy here, my poor Armand?”

“Were it not for you, I should have run away long ago. I tell you that openly, for my cousin, though he is only a poor official, and has no fortune, is very kind and friendly towards me; and I am quite sure that, if I were with him, I should never die with ennui!”

“O look, Armand, what a strange cavalcade!” suddenly cried Blanche, fairly clapping her hands with delight.

Armand's eyes followed the direction pointed out to him by Blanche. Quite near him, on the meadow-road, pranced a snow-white steed, on whose green-velvet saddle sat a beautiful lady. A dark, richly embroidered riding-habit hung nearly to the ground, and on the lady's slender hand sat a falcon, with piercing eyes and feathered top-knot. At her left, only a few steps behind, followed two other ladies; the one, a youthful maiden with a beaming countenance and beautiful black hair, the other a much older woman, and far less lovely and attractive. Several cavaliers, with richly caparisoned steeds, closed the procession.

The lady who rode the white horse, and who was unmistakably the superior in rank, gazed a moment inquiringly upon the children's faces, and then said, smiling: "Can you tell us how we may the most readily regain the main road to Paris? We have lost our way during the chase, and desire to reach the city before evening."

Armand reverentially lifted his velvet cap, and replied: "You will find no difficulty in so doing, noble lady; for if you turn to the right of this ridge, you will reach the main road in a quarter of an hour."

"What are your names, my children?"

Armand saw, from his little friend's evident embarrassment, that she had no desire to tell her name, and he was sufficiently adroit to turn the question upon himself alone, by replying at once: "My name is Armand de Clairville, noble lady."

"Clairville?" The lady seemed to be seeking some lost remembrance; the name was familiar to her, but she could not recall when and in what connection she had heard it.

She turned an inquiring glance upon her

young companion, who immediately replied, in a cheerful tone: "Ah, Madame! Count Roger de Clairville is the name of the strange hermit who preferred a self-inflicted banishment, passed in mourning and lamentations over our late blessed King Henry, to taking service under his glorious son and grandson."

"Ah yes! you are right, Mademoiselle Lucile. I remember now the strange tales I have heard of this eccentric Count; but he must be a very old man, this same Roger Clairville?"

"Nearly seventy years old, Madame," was Armand's answer.

"But how came the old hermit to plant you, the fresh young vine, in his desolate, cloistral garden?" asked the lady, graciously. "Do you share Count Roger's solitude willingly?"

Armand gazed a moment upon the beautiful, kind face bent down towards him, and then replied, in a low tone: "O, the young vine often longs to quit the melancholy shadows of the cloistral garden, and wander forth beneath the free, warm rays of the blessed sun!"

The lady smiled at the boy's frank confidence, and continued, "And where, then, think you to find the sun of your good fortune?"

"In Paris! only in Paris!" was the immediate reply.

"Ah, boy! that is merely a delusion of your childish fancy," returned the lady seriously. She paused a moment, and then continued: "Nevertheless, you may be right; and when you are older and taller, if you still long to be at King Louis's court, I will myself be your advocate. You have only to ask at the Louvre for Madame Henriette d'Orleans."*

Armand's eyes glistened as he bowed low before the kind lady, who smiled as she bade him farewell, and then hastened away with her companions towards the main road.

Some time elapsed before the excited boy could recover from his astonishment, and

* Henrietta of Orleans was the daughter of King Charles the First of England, and the wife of Philip of Orleans, King Louis the Fourteenth's brother. She was no less celebrated for her lofty spirit and keen intellect, than for her beauty and amiability. She plays no insignificant part in the history of France, as King Louis frequently consulted her, and relied much upon her judgment.

when he at length turned to look for Blanche, he found her striving to conceal herself behind a blooming elder-bush.

“O Blanche, come out, and do not be afraid; no one learned your name.”

“That is true, but I was nevertheless recognized. Miss Lucile de Raimond looked at me a long time; I do not care for that, because she is kind and good, but the Marchioness knew me too.”

“The Marchioness? What Marchioness?”

“O heaven! the proud old lady who looked at us so sharply and searchingly was the Marchioness de Maine, the wife of my father’s wicked enemy!”

Armand looked at the child with an expression of doubt.

“O, believe me, it was she!” continued Blanche, half weeping; “I know the Marchioness’s proud look too well, and even when we were in Paris she was one of Madame Henriette’s * ladies of honor.”

* We must here observe, that in France the king’s sister-in-law, that is, the wife of his eldest brother, was always called Madame of France, or simply Madame, while the princess royal bore the title of Mademoiselle of France.

“ And Madame Henriette, did you know her too ? ” continued Armand, with beaming looks.

“ I often heard her spoken of, and mamma always said she was goodness and loveliness personified.”

“ Come now, be consoled, my dear, sweet Blanche; only have patience for a few years, and then I will go to Paris, remind Madame of her promise, and when I have risen a little way into King Louis’s favor, I will soon convince him of your father’s innocence. The king is just and gracious. You will all return to court; we shall meet again, and will lead a charming life ! ”

Thus spake the inexperienced boy in his joyous enthusiasm, as he strove to dry the tears still flowing down his little friend’s cheeks. The latter did not seem to place much confidence in Armand’s future efforts, and, shaking her head, said beseechingly: “ O, do not wish to go to Paris; even the Princess thought that my longing, and your desire for the capital, were only childish fancies. O stay here, where you can meet with no misfortune ! ”

“Do not let it trouble you, dear! we have not come to that yet. Years must pass before the Princess will be willing to present me to the king, and you must see yourself, dear Blanche, that I cannot live for ever at that melancholy Clairville Hall.”

Blanche silently untwisted the wreath of forget-me-nots, and Armand's thoughts were also very far from the pleasure which the lovely blossoms had shortly before promised him.

“But look, see! what letter is this lying on the grass? Can the Princess have lost it?”

So saying, Armand lifted a curiously folded, delicately tinted paper from the very spot where the beautiful rider had halted. Blanche approached, and, opening the proffered sheet, said quietly: “It seems so, for the writing is English, and Madame is an English princess.”

Armand searched in vain for the address; none could be found; and as he was too discreet to seek the owner through the contents, he looked completely undecided as to what he had better do with his newly found treasure.

“Look at the name of the writer, Armand,” counselled Blanche.

The boy turned the fine, scented paper round, and saw in one corner of the last page the simple name, "Charles Nestling."

"O, that must be from Madame's brother, King Charles Stuart of England!" cried Blanche, eagerly.

"The letter must then be very valuable, and I will hasten and take it to her!" said Armand joyfully.

"You?"

"Certainly!"

"But how can you go to Paris?"

"O, that will be very easy. Count Roger will not prevent me when he learns why I wish to go."

"Yes, but how will you get there?"

"No difficulty in that, my dear, good Blanche. I can ride, and if necessary I will go on foot; the distance to Paris is very short!"

"But you will not be received at the court."

"I have the Princess's word."

"No one will believe you."

Armand turned hastily round.

"Do I then look like a liar? O Blanche, do not oppose me any longer, but let me go; it

may be God's will that I can very soon do something for your father."

She gave him her hand in the most friendly manner, and both returned to the cottage in silence. At the garden gate, the two children bade each other a solemn farewell; Armand then flew up the beech avenue, and soon arrived, heated and breathless, at the castle.

The quiet of the grave reigned there, as usual. The Count's three old servants, Germain, Baptist, and Francis, stood in the antechamber, with stiffly frizzed wigs, silk stockings, and knee-buckles. Their steps were light, their voices faint, and every word and gesture which they exchanged with one another, most carefully considered.

So much the more stormy seemed Armand's entrance. He rushed up to the three stiff figures, and cried, with glowing cheeks and imploring gestures: "Germain, now be a good old man, and announce me to my uncle!"

The three faces lengthened with amazement, and Germain replied in a whisper: "Count Roger de Clairville is taking his afternoon nap, and cannot be disturbed."

“ Yes, but it concerns things of the highest importance ! ”

The three silently shrugged their shoulders.

“ I will not disturb the Count long,” continued Armand, beseechingly ; “ you go, Baptist, and announce me.”

Baptist shook his head, while Francis placed himself as if keeping guard before the door of the Count’s room, and stretched out both his long arms like a sign-post.

The impatient boy begged and implored, but the three could not be induced to infringe in the least degree upon any command issued by the Count, and kept even a closer watch over their master’s chamber, than old Cerberus over his charge in the nether world.

After Armand had impatiently walked several dozen times up and down before the mythological figures which seemed to be planted in the floor, and had exhausted all his prayers and threats, he finally hurried down into the court-yard.

“ Come, come, Mr. Armand, what has excited you so ? ” suddenly cried a voice behind him.

The boy turned, and beheld the only youthful being, except himself, dwelling within the precincts of the castle.

This was a powerful, broad-shouldered lad, with an open and upright countenance; he was intrusted with the care of the Count's dilapidated stables, and performed the part of groom.

A new ray of hope shone in Armand's soul.

"Why should I trouble myself any longer with those stiff old mummies inside?" cried he. "You, John, you can help me, and you alone!"

"How so, sir?"

"Tell me, is there not one among the horses which can travel the short distance from here to Paris?"

John smiled as he replied: "O yes, there is Nestor; he is not overly young, but he has some strength left yet, and he was once a fine horse."

"Saddle him for me, quick."

"Are you going to Paris, sir?"

"Yes, yes; but do not delay."

John looked embarrassed, and twisted his cap in his hands.

Armand divined the cause of his hesitation, and said quickly: "Only do it; I will be responsible."

John made no further objections, and Nestor soon stood fairly saddled and bridled before the excited boy. Nestor, as far as age was concerned, did all possible honor to his celebrated Greek namesake; the saddle and bridle were also antiquated, and very dingy. It was by no means astonishing that fashion and brilliancy had both left them, as they had been wont to shine long before, in the days of King Henry.

Armand sprang into the saddle, trotted as swiftly as possible out of the court-yard, and displayed not a few airs and graces when, a few moments later, he rode past Blanche's window and bowed a joyful greeting, which she returned rather more seriously than was pleasing to him.

CHAPTER II.

ARMAND AT THE LOUVRE.

IN one of the little rooms of his modest dwelling near the Louvre sat Mr. Emilius Bernard, apparently seeking some reference of great importance in the great law-books by which he was surrounded. The young man's cheerful, even joyous mien, presented a striking contrast to the image usually conceived of a French lawyer. Emilius was in fact a mere beginner; he had but little practice, was little known, and, above all, had very little money.

His rooms were miserably furnished; the only ornamental articles being a few engravings hanging upon the walls, unless, indeed, a handsome guitar, with a broad band of green ribbon, might be included in the same category.

Mr. Emilius Bernard was a distant relative of Armand Clairville's mother, and the boy

had once before visited him, as he passed through Paris on his way to Clairville Hall.

Armand had left his cousin very unwillingly, for he had found under the gay young man's roof all that he had sought in vain at Clairville Hall, — kindness and affection.

Twilight had nearly darkened into night, when the young lawyer laid down his books and stepped to the little window.

“Zounds!” cried he suddenly, aloud, “who is that galloping down the street? Can it be my handsome little cousin?”

The next moment showed that he was not mistaken, for the stately Nestor, after sundry most remarkable leaps and bounds, finally stopped before his door, and Armand, springing from his steed, cried out to Bernard, who had hastened to meet him, “Have you any entertainment for my horse, cousin?”

“Certainly; lead the old fellow this way, Armand, and you will find a comfortable shelter for him in the yard.”

Nestor's wants were very modest, and were consequently soon satisfied.

“But, my dear little cousin, what brings

you so unexpectedly to Paris?" asked Bernard, tenderly pressing the boy's hand.

"Affairs of the utmost importance; but send your servant at once to brush the dust from my hair and clothes. I must go without delay to the Louvre!"

"You to the Louvre?" cried the lawyer, astounded.

"Certainly, my friend; I must hasten and set Madame Henriette's mind at rest as soon as possible!"

"The Princess Henriette?"

"Assuredly!"

Bernard laughed so heartily at the boy's important and mysterious air, that Armand finally concluded to tell him the cause of his sudden journey.

Bernard listened attentively, and, as the boy ended, gave him a friendly clap on the shoulder, saying:

"If I am not mistaken, your fortune is made, for Madame Henrietta loves such little adventures. But you must act prudently. In the first place, you must wait until the morning, for you cannot with propriety ask an

audience before; and also, your simple and dusty clothes are ill suited to the halls of the Louvre."

Armand looked somewhat abashed and disheartened, but Bernard continued, consolingly:

"Leave all to me; a furnishing-house near by will supply us with a handsome suit adapted to your neat little figure; you may then confidently betake yourself to the palace, and I have no doubt of the propriety of your behavior, or of your success, when once there."

Armand acquiesced, thankfully partook of the refreshing supper which Bernard prepared for him, and then, after his long and tiresome ride, slept soundly and sweetly under his cousin's friendly roof. The latter heard him whisper during his sleep, the names of "King Louis, Blanche, and Henriette." His dreams were surely of the Louvre.

The next morning Armand stood with a delighted air before Bernard's large mirror, while the good-natured cousin patiently smoothed and arranged the fine lace ruffles encircling the boy's wrists.

Armand wore snow-white stockings, and handsome shoes with buckles and rosettes. The short purple velvet breeches, and the waistcoat of the same color and material, were both trimmed with silver lace. A short mantle of white cashmere was fastened upon one shoulder and across the breast, with rich silver cords and tassels. His dark hair was carefully arranged in thick curls, and in his hand he held a little cap with a long ostrich plume.

“Heavens! how handsome you are, Armand!” cried Bernard, joyously. “You are wonderfully like your mother!”

A tear glistened in the boy’s eyes; he so longed this morning for a blessing from his mother, before he set out on a visit which he felt might influence the whole course of his life.

“Keep up your heart, my boy, and God be with you!” said Bernard, as he led him to the door.

The sun was not shining without so brightly as it had done the day before; the dirty, muddy streets gave sufficient evidence of the rain-

storm which had visited the city during the night.

Armand carefully made his way over the half-dried stones, and managed so adroitly that he finally arrived at the entrance to the Louvre with his handsome slippers as neat as when he left his cousin's house.

Before he entered, his glance fell upon a low balcony, on whose balustrade leaned several prettily dressed ladies, who appeared to be observing him attentively.

He looked again, and felt quite sure that one of the ladies, who smiled as her eye met his, was the kind-hearted Lucile de Raimond.

Armand's hand was upon his cap, but ere he could make his salutation, a splendid equipage rolled rapidly past him. The mud splashed high over the wheels, and before Armand could think of protecting himself, a horrible mass of black mud had covered his white-silk stockings and the bright borders of his pretty trousers; even his white cashmere mantle was all spotted with great black splotches.

The boy reddened with shame and mortification, cast a despairing glance over his ruined

toilet, with difficulty repressed his rising tears, and then looked up shyly towards the balcony, — it was empty.

The gay equipage which had thus suddenly precipitated Armand from the opening heaven of his dreams, stopped at the Louvre ; an elderly gentleman, with strongly marked, unprepossessing features, descended from it, and entered the palace.

Armand slunk sadly homewards.

Bernard could offer but meagre consolation, for his little treasury was so exhausted, that he could not even think of replacing the ruined articles. What was to be done ?

The two had discussed this knotty question for more than an hour without arriving at any satisfactory conclusion, when suddenly a strange servant in livery entered, and asked whether “ Mr. de Clairville ” was staying there. As Armand replied in the affirmative, the man placed a package in his hands and disappeared.

Armand looked inquiringly towards his cousin, who merely shrugged his shoulders, and proceeded to loosen the string bound round the package.

A beautiful suit of light-blue silk soon lay unfolded before the astonished eyes of the two young people.

"Now you see, my boy, some friend has taken pity on you!"

"But I have no friend except you, dear Emilius."

"Then it must have been a fairy," said the other, laughing. "But no matter for that now; dress yourself as quickly as you can, and you will still have time once more to try your fortune."

The clothes fitted as if they had been purposely made for Armand, and he soon stood, handsomer than ever, before his astonished cousin.

This time he reached the palace without any accidents, and was surprised at the alacrity with which a richly attired valet led him up the broad marble staircase.

They finally stopped in a long, vaulted hall, with lofty windows and white marble pillars. The valet bade him wait there, and entered a side-door.

Armand's heart beat loudly, his rapid pulse

was almost visible, and his agitation was still increasing, when the folding doors flew open.

Armand gazed in breathless expectation; a lady and gentleman advanced towards him; could it be Henrietta of France herself? But no;—before Armand stood the Marchioness de Maine, with her freezing glance, and at her side walked the gentleman whose carriage-wheels had irretrievably ruined his fine clothes.

The boy bowed slightly; the lady passed proudly on, without noticing his salutation, and accompanied the gentleman to the entrance of the hall. Ere she returned, the valet again appeared at the side-door, and beckoned Armand to follow him.

Within opened a large, handsome room, with embroidered tapestry and fleecy carpet. In the centre of the chamber stood a young girl, who hastened to meet Armand. It was Lucile de Raimond, who smiled as she said: “Do you wish to speak with Madame Henriette?”

“Such is my most earnest desire.”

“You are speedy in gratifying your longing

to visit the court and Madame; we did not think to have seen you yet for several years."

"And I should certainly not have ventured so soon to trespass upon her Royal Highness's favor, had I not yesterday found this letter, which I am quite sure must have been lost by Madame."

"O, how rejoiced the Princess will be!" cried Lucile; "it is a letter from her royal brother of England, which she would have been deeply grieved to have lost; I will go at once and announce you."

After a few moments the young lady returned, and led the astonished boy through a suit of apartments far surpassing in splendor and magnificence all his most brilliant dreams.

At the end of this gorgeous array of rooms and halls, Lucile raised a rich green damask curtain from a side entrance, and — Armand stood before the Princess!

The room into which Armand now entered was small, but most charmingly furnished and decorated. The painted walls glittered with foreign birds and flowers; parrots and birds of paradise were gracefully poised upon long

slender stems of gorgeous flowers, and all were so naturally delineated upon the white satin ground that every one must at first be tempted to deem them real. Chandeliers and side-lights were hung from the ceiling and the walls, and a costly Turkey carpet repeated upon the floor the wonderful birds and flowers on the tapestry. In the middle of the apartment stood a sofa of white satin, on which sat Henrietta of Orleans, with a richly gilded harp at her side.

Armand stood at the entrance, speechless and immovable; the Princess smiled, and beckoned him to approach.

The light waving of her hand aroused him from his stupor; the next moment he knelt reverentially before the noble lady, and presented her with the letter carefully wrapped in satin paper.

The Princess hastily grasped the little package, unfolded the letter, and then said joyfully: "You have done me a great service, greater perhaps than you are aware of; this letter from my royal brother deserves a better fate than to be forgotten and destroyed on the meadows of Clairville Hall."

Armand, although generally so prompt and self-possessed, could not as yet command a single word; but when Lucile, in accordance with her mistress's command, had placed the letter in a beautifully ornamented portfolio, and the latter turned an inquiring glance upon him, his good understanding and fine tact taught him how to win the favor of the Princess.

Henrietta of Orleans was celebrated for a courteous affability, and a considerate gentleness, which won all hearts. Through her father's unhappy end she had early in life become acquainted with its most bitter reverses, and in the midst of splendor and elevation never forgot to turn a willing ear to the humblest petitioner.

The bold and ardent but intelligent boy excited her interest; she laughed as she listened to his account of the monotonous life at Clairville Hall, and although Armand touched as lightly as possible upon his uncle's peculiarities, the benevolent lady could not but see that such a mode of existence must be unendurable to the high-spirited boy.

Lucile de Raimond aided the boy in his candid account of himself by sundry friendly nods and smiles, for she was as yet herself half a child, kind, ingenuous, and joyous.

While Armand with glowing cheeks and glistening eyes still stood before the Princess, the Marchioness de Maine, who filled the post of mistress of ceremonies, suddenly entered, and, bowing deeply, announced, "His Majesty, King Louis!"

Henrietta rose, and quickly approached the entrance; the heavy curtains parted, and Louis the Fourteenth stood upon the threshold.

The youthful monarch possessed a dazzling and surprising beauty, and his whole bearing was faultless; every gesture bore the stamp of knightly gallantry.

Armand scarcely breathed; to be so near his venerated King! — that was a happiness he had not even ventured to imagine.

King Louis's glittering eye rested a moment upon the boy, and then, hastening to greet his sister-in-law, he gallantly kissed her hand, and said, "I did not know that Madame was still, at this hour, giving audience."

“The hour was over long ago, your Majesty; but Armand de Clairville may esteem himself very fortunate that, through his tardiness, I have had an opportunity of presenting him to your Majesty, and of recommending him to your favor.”

Armand's heart beat loudly as he made a profound reverence. The King gave him a scrutinizing look, and the Princess made use of the pause to relate in as few words as possible the circumstance which had brought the boy to her.

As she mentioned the letter, the King said eagerly: “I am truly glad, Madame, that the letter from England did not fall into strange hands, and it was precisely upon matters pertaining to England that I ventured to intrude upon your Highness.”

King Louis was at that time endeavoring to prevent King Charles the Second of England from entering into an alliance with Holland and Sweden. To attain this end, he relied greatly upon the influence of his sister-in-law, who was also Charles the Second's own sister. The letter which Armand had

found was chiefly of importance as relating to this very point.

Henrietta of Orleans waved her hand, and Armand, at once comprehending the meaning of this gesture, followed Lucile into an antechamber, while the Marchiones vanished through an opposite door.

“O tell me quick, was the pretty little girl whom I saw with you yesterday your sister?” asked Lucile as soon as they were alone.

Armand blushed with embarrassment; he knew not whether he ought to mention Blanche’s name; he remembered, however, that the latter had herself described Miss de Raimond as a kind and gentle being; and, despising every appearance of falsehood, he finally replied: “No, she was not my sister.”

“Do not seek to mislead me; I am sure I cannot be mistaken, — it was Blanche de Saint Almé.”

Armand was silent.

“Do not think me inimical to her or hers,” continued she, earnestly; “on the contrary, I loved the pretty child, who was a playmate of my younger sister, most tenderly. O, and her

mother was such a lovely, kind-hearted lady! Come, can you not tell me something about them?"

Armand candidly related to the sympathetic Lucile all that he knew himself, but wisely concealed the suspicions entertained by M. de Saint Almé concerning the Marquis de Maine.

"I believe you are right, and that Blanche's father is innocent; but who can prove it?" said the good-natured young girl.

Before Armand could reply, the King passed out from Madame Henrietta's apartment; he again, and not without interest, observed the boy, and vanished, after returning the young lady's salutation.

Armand was once more bidden to the Princess's presence, and was asked whether he would like to be admitted as a page in her establishment.

Overcome by the excess of his gratitude and delight, he bent his knee before his lofty benefactress. What a glorious future was all at once opened to his view! He was to begin his career at court, under the very eye of

the Princess and of the King! If he acted well, he must surely receive an appointment as an officer, and then all the bold dreams might be fulfilled with which he had so lavishly entertained his little friend.

Happy beyond expression, Armand returned to his cousin's modest dwelling.

CHAPTER III.

THE DISCOVERY.

ARMAND must of course obtain his uncle's consent before he could accept his new appointment.

Count Roger received the boy on his return with considerably more warmth than he had ever before shown towards him, and listened to his account of his adventures with more interest than he had felt for anything since King Henry's death. Armand's lively descriptions, the enthusiastic picture which he drew of the monarch, awakened in the old gray-haired man pleasant memories of his own youth, when he had dwelt in the same palace, near his idolized sovereign.

Count Roger had become entirely indifferent towards the exterior world, but he could

not avoid both feeling and showing an interest, if only a fleeting one, in his nephew's plans and hopes for the future. He settled a considerable sum upon the boy, who was entirely dependent upon him, and, giving him his blessing, sent him to Paris; but when Armand's light steps no more resounded through the old halls at Clairville, the aged warrior's life became more quiet, monotonous, and desolate than ever.

Parting from Blanche cost both children many tears, and the little girl said sorrowfully: "I knew well that, when you had once been to Paris, you would never be content to dwell in our lonely valley; I saw that in your glistening eyes, when Madame Henriette promised to become your advocate. It will be a long, long time before we will meet again, my good Armand!"

"Do not think so, my dear, sweet Blanche; I will come sometimes and see you and my good uncle; besides, I will often think of you, and then —"

Blanche looked at him inquiringly.

"You see," continued he, seizing her hand,

“I must always think that you will return to Paris, and that your parents will be as happy and prosperous as they ever were.”

The child doubtingly shook her head, and the two parted.

Armand de Clairville was the handsomest page in Henrietta of Orleans's household. Graceful, prudent, and witty, he soon captivated all around him, and his mistress treated him more as a beloved, spoiled child than as a subordinate. He had several hours during the day unoccupied; and, following the counsel of Lucile, who was kind as a sister towards him, he employed them in study, and in extending the circle of his acquirements. It appeared that Lucile's father, Count Raimond, had been a friend of his own dead father's, and the Count, remembering with pleasure his former intimate relations, neglected no opportunity of serving the orphan boy.

Mr. Emilius Bernard was quite proud of his handsome little cousin, who had long since imparted to him his conviction that he was indebted for the pretty blue silk costume to Miss

Lucile, who had witnessed from her mother's window his mishap and confusion.

Although Armand succeeded in winning the good-will of nearly all around him, he was less fortunate with the Marchioness de Maine and her husband, — the very gentleman whose equipage had ruined his first costume. The Marchioness seemed, as well as Lucile, to have recognized Blanche, and although she never asked whether the boy were related to her or not, she always regarded him with mistrust. Armand cared little for the Marchioness's proud mien and repulsive hauteur, and was very careful not to display the least suspicion or sensitiveness. His demeanor towards her was ever quiet and measured, and she gradually began to look upon him less sharply and more indifferently.

But Armand never forgot his promise to Blanche; he retained a true and faithful remembrance of his little friend, who now dwelt alone in the blooming valley, and often thought of her lively playmate.

Thus passed several months.

One day, late in October, a magnificent festival was in preparation at the Louvre. During many days beforehand, nothing was talked of in Paris but the splendor and brilliancy which on that evening were to dazzle the eyes of all beholders. The festival was in honor of the Queen's birthday; and she, as a Spanish Princess, was so accustomed to luxury and display, that the most unparalleled magnificence was required to surprise her.

In the afternoon, Henrietta of Orleans sat before her rich toilet-table with a costly array of shining stones, rings, and strings of pearls spread out before her. She held a sparkling diadem of brilliants in her hand, and playfully laid it upon Lucile's dark locks. The young girl knelt before her mistress, and smiled as she submitted to this trial of the becomingness of the ornament. Armand was also present.

"You must adorn me with this to-night," said the Princess; "it is a gift from his Majesty, but it will scarcely appear so beautiful as amid your dark locks."

Neither Lucile nor Armand could agree to

this, for in the eyes of both, Henrietta's beauty was unrivalled. The Princess lifted the gorgeous diadem from Lucile's head, and wove instead a string of Oriental pearls amid the flowing curls, at the same time assuring the enchanted girl that the pearls were for her, and that she must wear them on that very evening.

While Lucile strove in vain to express her thanks to her kind mistress, the latter took a similar string, and, laying it in a little velvet case, said to Armand: "This is for the Marchioness de Maine; take it to her at once, Clairville!"

Armand bowed, and went, as obedience required, but sorely against his will, to the proud lady who was ever so ungracious to him.

At the end of a short corridor he entered the Marchioness's antechamber. It was empty; neither the lady nor any of her servants were to be seen. The room must have been occupied but a moment before, for the little inlaid, ebony writing-desk was half open. A red-morocco portfolio, with silver clasps, had fallen upon the floor, and the Marchioness's hand-





Powers & Weller Lith. Boston

THE DISCOVERY.

some greyhound crouched growling upon the floor, and used her sharp teeth to drag out a multitude of letters, which were immediately torn into a thousand pieces, and flew over the carpet like flakes of snow.

As Armand entered, Phœbe — such was the dog's name — friendlily wagged her white tail, but did not cease a moment in her labor of destruction.

Armand sprang upon her, and after a short struggle succeeded in rescuing the portfolio, which had meanwhile been so torn and bitten that the few remaining letters dropped out. He quickly gathered them together, and awaited the Marchioness's arrival, that he might restore to her the remnants of her property.

He waited long in vain; the lady must have left the room on very pressing affairs, as was proved by the open desk, with which, as it appeared from closer observation, Phœbe had for some time been amusing herself.

The day began to darken. Armand knew that his duty required him to return to the Princess, but he did not venture to leave the

pearls or the open letters in the unlocked room; neither could he trust them with a servant, although he might easily have found one.

He determined to give the ornament and letters to the Marchioness herself, somewhat later in the evening, and left the room, after having gathered up and laid aside the bits of paper strewing the carpet.

Phœbe curled herself up, with the most innocent air in the world, upon her mistress's embroidered sofa.

The Princess had several other commissions for her page which must be immediately fulfilled, and which detained him until he had no time to lose in making his own preparations for a suitable appearance at the ball.

The Marchioness, her letters, and Phœbe were soon entirely forgotten.

The gay saloons of the Louvre glittered with innumerable wax-candles, whose brilliant beams shone down upon thousands of blooming and gorgeously apparelled figures. It seemed as if all the treasure-houses in Eu-

rope had been rifled of their contents, so splendid and abundant were the gleaming stones and precious pearls adorning both cavaliers and ladies. The perfumed orange-trees and exotic plants, which, notwithstanding the coldness of the season, bloomed in beautiful, graceful vases, added much to the charm of the tastefully ornamented halls.

Maria Theresa,* Queen of France, entered, led by her husband. She was a mild lady, with gentle, almost timid features, and far less beautiful than her sister-in-law. Henrietta of Orleans, led by the Duke, Philip, followed the royal pair. In her train came the Marchioness de Maine, with her head loftier than ever; and, as if not content with the already unusual height of her stature, she had placed on the very top of her unlovely head a cap with nodding plumes.

Henrietta's maids of honor, among whom was Lucile de Raimond, in a white gauze dress with the pearls in her dark hair, followed

* We should perhaps remark, that Maria Theresa of France, a princess of Spanish birth, is here alluded to, and not the celebrated Maria Theresa of Austria, who lived a century later.

the proud mistress of ceremonies, and with them came the Princess's pages.

Armand, with looks lofty as a field-marshal, stepped securely and composedly over the smooth and shining floor. Whoso had then seen him, with his richly embroidered suit of green velvet, the sleeves trimmed with white satin puffs and bows of ribbon, and in his hand a tiny cap whose snowy ostrich-plumes swept the floor, would certainly have agreed that the boy was well fitted to adorn the suite of the idolized Princess Henrietta.

Armand seemed to feel thus himself, for he answered the Marchioness's haughty glance with another quite as haughty; he also seemed to be in no mood to impart to her the information that he had rescued a portion of her letters from Phœbe's sharp teeth.

To-morrow would be quite time enough to afford her that pleasure; he was then fully occupied in waiting on his mistress, by handing her refreshments on massive silver waiters.

Fatigued by the oppressive ceremonies and formalities which royalty was at that period forced to endure at similar festivals, Henrietta

of Orleans soon withdrew into a small side-room, of which the entrance was permitted only to a favored few. She did not return to the throne-hall until near the close of the ball, and there she perceived that she had lost or forgotten her fan in the little side-room. A fan was at that day such an indispensable article of a lady's wardrobe, that one almost fancied it impossible to exist, if deprived of that important accessory to grace and good manners.

The active Armand was soon sent in search of the missing fan, and a few moments after, the boy entered the little cabinet.

It was empty, and in the very spot where so many had so recently longed to be, neither lady nor cavalier could now be seen. They had all departed with the Princess.

Armand looked amid the downy cushions of the divan, and on the carpet, but in vain; he could not find the fan, which, in accordance with the then prevailing fashion, was much too large to be easily concealed.

One place still remained unsearched; this was a deep window-recess, half hidden be-

hind a mass of heavy, dark curtains; the Princess had frequently retired for a few moments into this sequesfered spot, whence the tumult and confusion of the glittering throng seemed more distant and less oppressive.

Armand slipped behind the curtains, and a moment after, his eyes fell upon a bunch of marabout feathers with a chased gold handle; this was the missing fan, and Armand joyfully turned to leave this solitary place.

As he opened the curtains to return, he suddenly perceived he was no longer alone. The Marquis de Maine and his wife stood immediately before the recess, but did not seem to perceive him, and their countenances, which were always exhibited to the multitude so cold and stiff that no one could divine a single thought or feeling, now exhibited unmistakable signs of strong excitement.

Armand suffered the curtain gently to fall into its place, not knowing at the moment what it was best for him to do.

“Madame,” said the Marquis, in a low but angry tone, “I always thought those letters

would bring misfortune upon us ; why have you delayed so long in committing them to the flames ? ”

“ I could not dream, my lord, that there could be thieves in the palace, who would rifle the secrets of my writing-desk ! ” replied the lady coldly.

“ And yet you are usually very mistrustful, Adèle ; how came you upon this occasion to neglect your usual precautions ? ”

“ The letters were securely placed in a locked portfolio.”

“ And the desk ? ”

“ It is possible that in my haste I neglected to lock it ; you remember, Gaston, that you sent for me to your chamber to discuss some important affairs ; when I returned, I found the desk open ; the portfolio was missing, but there was no other sign of any one’s having made a forcible entrance into the room.”

Armand was about to step forth and announce the fortunate rescue of the papers, when he heard the Marchioness say, in a spiteful tone : “ The portfolio also contained those unfortunate letters which would have

destroyed you long ago, had you not been prudent enough to throw the blame upon Saint Almé."

Armand scarcely breathed. The Marquis strode up and down the room with rapid steps and sparkling eyes. He felt that a terrible storm was about to burst over his head, and now that he was in danger, he could not think of breaking with the only being in the world bound to cling to him; he consequently somewhat softened his tone as he said: "And have you no suspicion, Adèle? Are there none of your suite who might play you such a rascally trick?"

"I have no reason to distrust any of my servants; but my valet saw the little Clairville, Madame's saucy page, leave my room."

"What are you dreaming of, Adèle; that insignificant child?"

"Insignificant, my lord? I have already told you, that, the first time the Princess and I saw him, Blanche de Saint Almé was with him. The children may very readily have entered into some conspiracy, for Saint Almé always mistrusted you."

The Marquis cried out hastily: "The boy must be arrested before he has any opportunity of misusing the papers!"

"But under what pretext?"

"We must impute to him some trifling negligence in his service, which I, as lord high-steward, can very readily do; during the arrest, it will not be difficult, through force or persuasion, to bring the boy to a confession. Of course, no one must know of what we accuse him."

The cunning Marchioness certainly had no need of this closing admonition, and she received it with a contemptuous smile. She did not, however, oppose the plan of accusing Armand, and thus parted the worthy pair to return to their places in the throne-hall.

Armand still lingered a short time in his hiding-place, to deliberate. To make a confidante of the Princess was impossible, for the ball was not yet ended, and she was surrounded by a circle of the highest nobility. But he was also convinced that before the end of the evening he would be arrested, and that during his arrest the Marquis would search

his room. Finally his thoughts fell upon Miss de Raimond, who had always testified so deep a sympathy towards Blanche and her family.

He left the window-recess, and, hastening out through a side-door, passed through several corridors, and finally reached his own room. He hid the letters carefully about him, and returned to the throne-hall by the same route.

He found Madame Henriette in earnest conversation with Madame de Sevigné (a gifted authoress), and his long absence occasioned no remark, as the Princess silently took her fan from his hand, now quivering with the excitement of a joyful hope.

Armand soon found an opportunity of imparting to his friend Lucile all the weighty occurrences of the last few hours. Lucile was delighted at the idea of being instrumental in the vindication of poor Saint Almé's reputation, and willingly took charge of the important letters, which were much safer in her hands than in those of Armand.

“Ha! Blanche, now your father will be

entirely justified, and I, your friend, will be the chief cause!"

Supported by this powerful consolation, Armand quietly awaited the lord high-steward's vain arrest.

CHAPTER IV.

“TIME UNVEILS TRUTH.”

THE ball finally came to an end, and Armand's previsions were correct, for he had scarcely entered his room when he received an order from the lord high-steward to proceed at once to the guard-room, and there await his future destination.

This was a very unusual mode of proceeding, for the pages accused of some slight fault in the performance of their duty were always first subjected to confinement in their own apartments, and only sent to the guard-room when the fault was proved, and was of sufficient importance to deserve actual punishment. With a serene countenance and some careless observation, Armand followed the young officer who had been sent to lead him

to the guard-room; and the young man, astonished at the boy's self-possession, smiled as he half-mechanically repeated the consolatory sentences he was accustomed to make use of on similar occasions.

As soon as Armand was out of sight, the Marquis, under some frivolous pretext, caused the page's door to be forced open. He entered with his customary air of stiff grandeur; but scarcely had the servants left him, when his countenance assumed an entirely different expression. Rage and hate shot from the little sunken eyes, as with impatient haste he proceeded to open Armand's writing-desk.

His search was of course in vain. Neither note nor envelope, not even the most trifling scrap of paper, justified his suspicions. But the less cause he found to suspect the boy, the more deeply he felt convinced that Armand was about to betray him. He did not doubt that Saint-Almé had confided to the page all the secrets of his fall, and his suspicions. If the letters had been stolen and were to fall into Saint-Almé's hands, the justification of the latter, and the ruin of the

Marquis, would be inevitable, for they would prove only too clearly that De Maine had acted as a spy for England, and had betrayed the king's agreement with Holland.

The more hopeless the search became, the more violently was the worthy nobleman's wrath enkindled; he even forgot his customary prudence, and tossed about the books and papers in so reckless a manner that all soon fell into confusion, and the Marquis's stiff fingers strove in vain to restore a little order, and conceal the traces of his passionate search.

He looked through all the boy's clothes and closets, but of course in vain.

Great drops of perspiration rolled down from the Marquis's pale brow; fear and anguish seized upon him, and left him but one last hope, — the boy must have concealed the papers in the clothes which he then wore.

The lord high-steward at once betook himself to the guard-room.

He found the boy in a little side-chamber, reading; the good-natured officer on guard had lent him a heart-rending, knightly romance, which had completely reconciled the young page to his involuntary captivity.

The night was quite cold ; Armand still wore the light dress which he had donned for the festival, and could not avoid shivering to his fingers’ ends as the cold chills ran down beneath his lace cuffs.

He silently rose as the Marquis entered, and quietly assented, as the latter said, with unusual condescension : —

“ It is not my intention, Clairville, to expose your tender constitution to the injurious influence of the cold, at least so far as it can be avoided. Your servant stands without with warmer clothes, and with his aid you can make yourself much more comfortable than you are at present.”

Armand at once understood the noble lord’s guileful proposition, but silently retired, and arrayed himself in the warmer clothing.

The servant was a creature of the lord high-steward’s, and in all things blindly subservient to his will. He watched closely whether the page would take a letter or a package from the pockets of his court-dress, and as he did not do so, he triumphantly placed the fine costume in the Marquis’s hands.

In vain did the latter turn all the pockets inside out, and loosen all the folds; the delicate laces were almost destroyed by the impatient handling of the angry man;—but the desired papers were nowhere to be found.

As soon as Lucile de Raimond heard of Armand's arrest, she hastened to her father, and, giving him the letters, admitted him into the secret.

The Count saw at once that he could now prove the truth of a conviction which he had long secretly entertained. Notwithstanding the weight of evidence against Saint-Almé, Count Raimond had never believed him guilty, for he had always known him to be a faithful servant of King Louis. De Maine had so skilfully woven the meshes of suspicion round the King's mind, that in the first violence of his anger he would listen to no defence of Saint-Almé, although the latter had once stood very high in his favor. But now this violence had somewhat abated; and only a few days before, he had spoken of Saint-Almé to the Count with considerable interest.

Lucile's father soon decided upon his course of conduct; he hastened to the king, and imparted to him the important discovery, to which Louis listened with the more interest, that he had formerly been really attached to Saint-Almé.

And thus, while the Marquis and his spouse were employing all the powers of their treacherous natures to recover the letters, they were already in the very hands in which they chiefly feared to see them.

There could no longer be found any pretext for detaining the page; Henrietta of Orleans had herself repeatedly asked for him, and he could consequently be accused of no negligence in her service.

He then found himself the next day restored to his place at his mistress's side, and great was his delight when Lucile joyfully whispered in his ear the result of her efforts.

The Marquis inwardly despaired, but he skilfully maintained his usual proud demeanor. But his cold features assumed a really hideous expression, when, on the third day after the ball, he beheld Saint-Almé enter the king's antechamber.

De Maine gasped for breath, but after a few moments, recovering his self-possession, he said with icy politeness: "Sir, I can scarcely believe that you seek an audience of his Majesty?"

"Most assuredly I do; it was for that purpose I came hither, Lord Marquis."

"Your endeavor will be fruitless, M. de Saint-Almé!"

"The audience is nevertheless granted," replied De Raimond, who at that moment left the king's apartment, and beckoned Saint-Almé to follow him.

The Marquis stood as if stricken by a thunderbolt.

With the aid of the important letters, it was of course very easy for Saint-Almé entirely to justify himself, and he soon stood higher than ever in King Louis's favor.

It was suggested to the Marquis and his worthy spouse that they had better leave the court as soon as possible, and enjoy in some foreign land the pleasant consequences of conspiracies with England.

The noble pair never knew exactly to whom

they owed their fall; they divined that the tell-tale letters must have come into the King's possession, but the manner of their betrayal always remained a mystery to them. At all events, they never suspected the guilty Phœbe, for she accompanied her mistress to a foreign country, where both soon after died.

The Marquis also closed his renowned career in Italy

The meeting with Blanche was a moment of rapture to both children, and, now that they were so frequently together, they often thought with fond remembrance of the lovely valley near Clairville Hall.

Years passed; old Count Roger de Clairville died, and we may presume that his melancholy longing was finally satisfied by an eternal reunion with his truly loved King Henry.

The Count left considerable property, and all, including Clairville Hall, was inherited by his only living relative, Armand Clairville.

Our handsome page lived now no longer in

the immediate service of Henrietta of Orleans ; he had entered a royal regiment, and the brilliant dreams with which he had entertained his little friend were so far fulfilled, that her colors, which he always wore, had been victorious in many a gay tournament. As a man, he fulfilled all the promise of the boy, and was ever brave, good, and handsome ; he also continued to be an especial favorite of Henrietta's.

Lucile de Raimond had married long before, and Blanche now held her place as maid of honor.

After a time, Blanche became Armand's wife ; and although they lived chiefly at the court, yet they passed a portion of every year at Clairville Hall, and changed it from a solitary wilderness into a beautiful and blooming summer residence.

M. and Madame de Saint-Almé also frequently visited their modest little cottage in the smiling valley of Clairville Hall.

THE MOUNTAIN-ELF'S GIFT.

A LEGEND.



Powers & Willers Lith Boston

TONY.

CHAPTER I.

TONY'S FRIEND.

EVENING was fast approaching; the village bells were summoning all to prayer, and the country people were returning from the fields to enjoy their well-earned repose.

On the main road was seen a solitary boy of about twelve years old; over his shoulder hung a wallet, which, judging from its slight proportions, certainly contained very little. The boy strode nimbly on, sang a merry ballad, and between the verses yodelled like an Alpine hunter, with his fresh, clear voice.

“Forward! forward, my friend!” said he encouragingly to himself; “yonder lie the mines where your godfather is overseer, and in one little half-hour you will be there. Huzza! huzza! you will soon be there!”

It grew gradually darker and darker, and although near objects might still be clearly distinguished, yet the more distant faded into a strange and confused dimness of outline. The hill containing the mine, especially, looked like a great black colossus rising to heaven, and although Tony — such was the boy's name — thought himself every moment about to reach the spot, it always retreated before him, farther and farther into the dim distance.

“H-m, that is strange,” thought Tony; “there is the house, with its glass windows on which the setting sun was shining but a few moments since, and which certainly belongs to my godfather; I have seen it plainly for the last half-hour, and now it stands there like a cloud, so gray and distant; well, well, that may be the effect of the closing shades of night.”

The boy was still walking rapidly onward, when he suddenly heard a clear voice behind him cry out: “Hola, my lad! whither away so fast?”

Tony turned, and saw in the twilight the tall, spare figure of a miner; his dark blouse with its red lacings, and the miner's cap on his

head, clearly announced his profession, and he also carried in his hand a spade of such glittering metal that its form was still perfectly distinguishable.

Tony politely lifted his cap and replied: "I would like before night to reach the valley of Laubbrunn; my godfather, the Overseer of the mines, lives there, and he expects me to-day."

"Indeed," replied the stranger, in a drawling tone, "and are you already acquainted with your godfather?"

"O no!" answered the boy; "I come from a great distance; my home is at least forty miles from here. It is now two years since I became an orphan; and when my good mother died, she little thought how her poor Tony would be tormented. My uncle, the rich landlord of 'The Star,' in L——, took me after my mother died to his own house. But he did not love me at all; he would not send me to school, and scolded me all day long, because I was poor and could not earn enough to satisfy him. I often visited my mother's grave, where I wept bitterly, and

longed to go far, far away from my cross uncle. I frequently thought of my rich godfather in the valley of Laubbrunn, and one evening, when I was thinking of writing him a letter, and of telling him all my miseries, a handsome little miner stepped up to me, — I was in the graveyard, — and gave me a note, saying, ‘This was sent you by Mr. Steele, the Overseer at Laubbrunn.’ My hand trembled, for no one had ever written to me before, but I quickly broke the seal and read: —

“‘Silly boy, why have you never written to me how unhappy you are? Have you no confidence in your old godfather? Tie up your wallet, bid your uncle of “The Star” farewell, and come to Laubbrunn, where you will find a second father in old Steele,

YOUR GODFATHER.’

“Now, I never could understand,” continued Tony, confidentially, “how my godfather learned my misfortunes, for I had never written to him. But no matter for that! I turned round to take leave of the neat little miner, but he was nowhere to be seen. I told

my uncle that my godfather had sent for me to come to Laubbrunn. He seemed quite rejoiced, and said to me, 'Go, by all means, my boy; here is a half-dollar for travelling money. Farewell. I wish you all success!'

"It is now three days since I left L——; the half-dollar was soon spent, and I have been very hungry! But never mind that: yonder is Laubbrunn, where my kind godfather lives."

When Tony had thus ended his account of himself, the strange miner laughed gayly, and said: "Yes, yonder is Laubbrunn; do you know your godfather's house?"

"No," replied the boy; "could you show me the way?"

"I?" said the stranger with surprise; "no, I am not acquainted with the Overseer."

The boy looked astonished, and asked, "Do you not then belong to the mine?"

"No — yes — that is, not exactly —"

"I do not understand you," said the boy, shaking his head.

"No? well, there is no need you should! Enough, I cannot now accompany you, but I will tell you how you must go. Keep always

to the right of the white wall, and take care lest you should meet some goblin —”

“ O what silly stuff !” laughed the boy.

“ Do you not then believe in the mountain elves ?” asked the stranger.

“ I believe ? No indeed !”

“ And are you not afraid of them ?”

“ No.”

“ But they are bad fellows, boy.”

“ Nonsense ! they will do me no harm !” said Tony. “ If there should really be such beings as elves, and they should be wicked, I am sure God will not let them do me any harm ; and if they are good, they will probably send me gold and treasures from their dark caves, and that would be delightful.”

“ You are a foolish fellow, little boy, and I have only to repeat, Take care of yourself ! See, here is the end of the white wall, and now I must go. Turn to the left until you come to a deep well with a stone railing round it ; but do not go too near, for the well is haunted. At the right of the well stands a little white house, with a linden-tree before the door ; there dwells Steele, the Overseer ; good night, my boy !”

“ Good night, and many thanks, dear sir,” replied Tony, offering his hand to the stranger ; but the latter must have turned the corner in the road very rapidly, for he was nowhere to be seen.

The boy walked on, and soon stood before the strange well.

It was now quite late, the moon shone down from heaven and flooded the road, the well, the house, and the linden, with its pure white light, so that Tony could plainly distinguish all the surrounding objects. He went straight to the well, and looked down into its depths ; but he saw nothing save the dark water lying at a great depth, and glittering in the moonlight as if it were some supernatural flame, emitting silver sparks. The rim of the well consisted of a broad wall of gray stone, shaped almost like a basin ; a wooden bucket attached to a long chain hung down into the well, but nothing unusual or peculiar was anywhere to be seen.

Tony passed on and knocked at the entrance of the little house ; but as no one said, Come in, he softly entered the hall door.

All was dark and still; his heart beat quick with joy, at the thought that he was so soon to greet a godfather, who would surely give him a hearty welcome.

A ray of light glimmered through a crack in a side door; he went nearer and tapped lightly.

"Come in!" cried a loud voice.

Tony modestly entered.

He found himself in a small apartment; on the sofa lay a man of about forty years old, with strong features and gloomy, black eyes; on the floor beside him sat two immense dogs, which flew upon the boy with a tremendous noise, and would have torn him to pieces had the man not called them off. Beside the sofa sat a pretty young woman, with a little girl of about five years old in her lap.

Tony lifted his cap and said, "I came to see Mr. Steele, the Overseer."

"I am he, lad; what do you want?" asked the man.

The boy shrank back affrighted, but, finally recovering himself, continued: "Oh! are you then the dear godfather who has been so long expecting me?"

"I am expecting no one."

Tony looked abashed and astonished, but finally stammered: "But the letter —"

"What letter?"

The boy placed the paper in his hands.

The Overseer laid an immense pair of spectacles across his nose, unfolded the letter, read it, and then said shortly: "I never wrote it."

"O, then you are not the Overseer?"

"Don't chatter such nonsense, boy! I certainly am Steele, the Overseer at Laubbrunn; but I never wrote this trash; some one else has used my name, and played a joke upon you. Who are you, then?"

"My name is Tony Petersen, and I lost both father and mother about two years ago."

"I am sorry to hear that; I knew your parents well, and was godfather to one of their little boys."

"Ah, dear sir, I am that very little boy!" cried the excited child, advancing towards the Overseer, with the intention of embracing him.

"Enough, leave your nonsense!" cried the latter, harshly; "what do you want with me?"

“ Ah, my good godfather, I was so forsaken in the world! and once, as I was weeping very bitterly at my mother's grave, a little miner suddenly stood before me and brought me your letter —”

“ Silly stuff! I tell you, boy, I never wrote that letter,” thundered out the Overseer.

“ Well, — well, — the letter which I thought my good godfather had written,” stammered Tony; “ and because I was so lonely and forsaken, I tied up my wallet and came here, for I surely thought you had invited me.”

“ No, indeed! I never dreamed of such a thing. I have no room for strange children! Some wag has played this trick upon you to give you a long journey for nothing; you may stay here to-night and rest, but to-morrow you must go back to your uncle; you cannot remain with me!”

So saying, the hard-hearted man left the room.

Hot tears rolled down over Tony's cheeks; during three whole days had he walked, heeding neither hunger nor thirst, and scarcely feeling fatigue, because his body and mind were

both supported by the hope of finding a second parent in his godfather! And now, the letter was not really from the Overseer; and further, although Mr. Steele was his godfather, he was not the less a cruel man, who had offered him shelter for a single night only, after his long and wearisome journey, during which he had not once tasted warm food, and which had cost him his only pair of shoes, to say nothing of his bleeding feet. What should he do now?

Suddenly he felt the touch of a light hand upon his shoulder; he looked up, and saw the pretty, pale woman, who gently said to him: "Do not weep, my boy; my husband means no harm, and I am sure, if you will gently persuade him, he will do something for you, for I have often heard him speak of his little godson, and when he finds that you have told the truth —"

The boy blushed crimson, and said sensitively: "O ma'am, I am no liar!"

"I did not say you were, my child," replied the woman; "but you must see that this letter is a very strange affair, for, believe me, my

husband never wrote it, and so many years have passed since he last saw you, that of course he could not recognize you."

Tony saw that the good woman was right, and that if the Overseer had not really written the letter, — a point which he entirely failed to comprehend, — he had reason sufficient to mistrust him.

"Come, dry your eyes, and sit on my chair, beside the little girl; I will make you some warm broth, for you look tired and hungry. And then I will talk with my husband, who, for all he seems so harsh and gloomy, has a good heart."

So saying, the woman left the room; the boy still stood, sad and despairing, in the middle of the apartment, when he suddenly felt his arm encircled by two little soft hands, and heard a pleasant, childish voice say, coaxingly: "Won't you come and build houses with little Maggie, out of the blue stones that Rupert brought?"

"Are you Maggie?" asked Tony, bending down to the child.

"Yes, big man, I am little Maggie, and you

are much gentler than Rupert, and so you must play with me. I will sing you all the little songs that Rose taught me, and will give you my supper, if you will only play with little Maggie."

"And so I will; but where then?"

The child hastily drew out the sofa, pushed the boy behind it, and then, arranging a table so that it filled up the open space, the pair found themselves in a nice little house. Maggie upset a tiny willow basket upon the table, and all her playthings rolled out, — little wooden trees and houses, colored stones from the mine, tiny paper figures, wooden dolls, and a multitude of similar articles. The child screamed with delight, and, filling her little hand with the brilliant stones, gave them to the boy, saying: "Maggie will give you all these."

"Where did you get them, my sweet child?"

"A pretty little girl with golden curls gave them to me down by the well."

"But then you ought not to give them away."

The child became quite thoughtful, laid her

finger very seriously on one side of her little nose, and put all the blue stones together in a bag, which she replaced in the basket. This done, she said, gayly : “ Now we will play ‘ Good luck ’ ! ”

“ But that is a game I do not know, Maggie.”

The child sighed with comic earnestness : “ Ah ! you must be very stupid, big man ; take this little hammer and knock on the table, then you will be a miner, and I will be papa, — so ! Now light the little lantern and go under the table, we will play that is the mine. Now — are you in ? Yes ? Well, then sing with me :

“ Good luck ! Good luck !
The mine is before us,
We enter it bold and free ;
Then chant we our chorus,
For God watches o’er us,
And never alone are we !
Good luck ! ”

The child repeated the song which she daily heard sung by the miners, like a little parrot, and her clear voice rang out through the room like a silver bell. Tony crouched under the table, and sang as well as he could after her.

Maggie laughed heartily, for the boy's singing was in truth far from charming.

Tony finally asked, "May I not come out, Maggie? My back hurts me; the table is not high enough to sit under."

The child joyfully clapped her hands and sprang down to him. "So, — now I am the miner, and you are papa; get up on the sofa, and I will sing."

With inexhaustible patience the simple game was ever renewed; the child grew livelier and livelier, and trilled out a whole budget of songs, which Tony repeated after her.

The boy forgot all his sorrow while playing with the dear little girl; he laughed, jested, and sang with her, until she finally asked: "Will you always stay with little Maggie?"

Tony remembered his forlorn condition, and replied in a low and desponding tone: "I would willingly do so, but my godfather does not wish it."

"But that is very naughty in your godfather."

"O do not say so: he is your father."

Maggie opened her eyes, but understood not a word.

At that moment the mother entered, bringing a bowlful of smoking broth; Rose, the young servant-maid, followed, with a dish of peeled potatoes, fresh wheat-bread, and good butter. O, how our poor hungry Tony enjoyed the savory steam!

"Come, boy, help me on with the table-cloth, bring the pewter plates, and take care of the lamp!" cried Mrs. Steele. "That is well, you are very skilful," continued she, encouragingly, as Tony arranged all to her satisfaction.

The trio took their places and enjoyed their suppers, while the Overseer smoked his pipe and drank his wine at the tavern. Mistress Mary Steele was a careful housewife, gentle and industrious, but rarely could she succeed in pleasing the Overseer, he was so cross and tyrannical; indeed, he led his poor wife a very miserable life.

The little girl prattled gayly on during the whole of supper time. Soon, however, she became more quiet, began to rub her eyes, which she tried in vain to keep open, and finally fell asleep, burying her pretty, curly

head, like a little dove, in the cushions of the sofa.

When Tony had entirely satisfied his hunger, Mistress Mary took a lighted candle, and said to him : " Come, I will show you your room."

Tony followed her up a little, well-scoured pair of stairs to a pretty room, in which stood a white covered bed, most invitingly offering repose to the boy's weary limbs.

" And now, my boy, you must sleep quietly here until morning. I will meanwhile speak with my husband, and he will perhaps give you permission to remain longer. Do not set your light too near your bed, lest the coverlet should take fire ; and if you hear a noise in the night do not be alarmed ; the water in the well often rises to a great height, and as it communicates with the water in the mine, the two combined make a great rushing and commotion. But do not fear, there is not the least danger ; good night, my child, and sleep well !"

So saying, good Mrs. Steele left the room.

Tony was now alone ; the various occur-

rences of the last few days floated confusedly through his brain. He had a refuge for the night, but he could not avoid thinking of the morrow. And then, who could have played him that wicked trick about the letter?

“ Ah ! ” he sighed, “ if I had remained with my uncle, I should at least have had food and shelter, and now he will surely not receive me if my godfather sends me away. If I only knew the name of the kind miner whom I met to-day, he might perhaps shelter me until I could find some employment.”

Tony sadly stepped to the window ; the moon was shining brightly, and the water in the well glittered like silver. An irrepressible sense of weariness finally overcame the boy, and, quickly undressing himself, he crept into the soft feather-bed.

Ere he slept, he prayed earnestly and trustingly to God, as indeed good children never forget to do ; for if they are sad and troubled, prayer will render them more peaceful ; and if they feel happy and joyous, it is but reasonable that they should thank God for having made them so.

When Tony had finished his prayer, he felt much more cheerful and contented, and soon closed his weary eyes in a sweet sleep.

After a time he thought he heard a great noise as of rushing waters; still half asleep, he opened his eyes and saw the white foam glittering among the dark branches of the linden. It rose higher and higher, and finally came with such violence against the window-panes that they were broken, and the foaming stream poured through the room. And as the white waves flowed in, one after another, they divided, and were changed into shining crystals and bars of silver lying in rows upon the floor. Suddenly, the room swarmed with little figures in long beards and miners' blouses, with spades over their shoulders, and tiny dark-lanterns in their hands. They walked solemnly two and two to the boy's bedside, and softly sang the following words:—

“ In the mine dark and deep,
Bright treasures we keep,
And watch them with unceasing care!
Of crystals the whitest,
Of metals the brightest,

Down in the deep,
How they peacefully sleep,
Those treasures of earth, rich and rare !

“ Whom the spirits would serve,
They lead him below ;
As he may deserve,
Their gifts they bestow.
Through the darkness of night
We 'll lead him below,
And dazzle his sight
With the glorious show
Of the treasures we keep
In the mine dark and deep,
Of the treasures of earth, rich and rare !
Good luck ! ”

When the song was ended, the strange little elves began to hammer and knock against the crystals and silver bars until the pieces flew high in the air, and fell upon the bewildered boy's little couch. Tony's forehead was covered with a cold sweat, and yet all looked gray and indistinct, as if it were indeed only a dream.

Four little elves stood near his bed, and struck their silver hammers upon a bar of metal seemingly as hard as iron. It finally began to yield ; at first, only small fragments

flew off, but at length it divided in the middle, and a brilliant light issued from the cleft as if a crimson tulip had suddenly unfolded its leaves. From the centre of the silver bar stepped forth a little elf with a shining crown upon his head; but no one could tell whether the crown were made of gold, or whether it were composed of living, leaping flames.

The little elf-king approached the boy's bed, and the latter immediately recognized the pretty little miner who had given him the letter in the graveyard. And as Tony was doubtfully gazing upon the elf, his form suddenly attained the full height of a grown man, and the boy at once recognized the pale, handsome miner who had on that very day pointed out to him the Overseer's house.

"Do you know me, then, my boy?" asked the miner.

"Certainly, O certainly! It was you who were so kind to me, and I had already thought of coming to you to beg work and bread."

"I heard your wish, although you did not speak it aloud, but I could not grant it because I am far removed from the sphere of

humanity, and only occasionally seen by men. Your desolate condition has excited my compassion, for children bereft of their parents are much more exposed to all the dangers and temptations of life than those who have a father and mother to watch over them. I will take care of you so long as you deserve it, so long as you continue to be good and pious, and carefully follow all your mother's instructions. Even when you do not see me, you must not despair of my aid, for I will be so near you that I can divine all your most secret thoughts and wishes; therefore beware lest you become naughty, and forget your God, for with my favor you lose all your good fortune. Be patient when you are harshly treated, forgiving when you are injured, and strong when temptation would lure you from the right path! You human beings all have an inner voice, which tells you when you do well, and warns you when you go astray. That voice is true and faithful, and you must ever heed it.

“But I will also give you a visible guide, which will warn and protect you; but do

not weary my patience, nor that of the messenger which I will send you from my realms in the depths of the earth. Should you scorn his warnings, and persevere in any evil from which he would strive to deter you, you lose my aid for ever. Farewell! ere the moon has twice risen, my messenger will be with you; you will know him at once, and you must place full confidence in his counsels.

So saying, the elf bowed and laid his hands upon the boy's eyes, which immediately closed in a sweet and refreshing slumber.

When Tony awoke, the morning sun was shining brightly into his chamber, which was now quite empty and quiet. He rose and looked timidly round him, but saw nothing to occasion him the least uneasiness. He thought he must have been dreaming; but no! every word spoken by the elf still resounded in his ears. Surely, surely his kind protector must have sent him the letter, that he might come where he could himself guide and watch over him.

"O what kind of a messenger will he send me?" cried he aloud.

Of course he received no answer.

At the same moment he heard the Overseer's harsh voice resounding below.

He quickly dressed himself, and went down into the sitting-room to await his future destination; his heart beat anxiously, but he boldly entered the room in which the Overseer with his wife and child sat at breakfast.

"Good morning, dear godfather! good morning, Mrs. Steele! God bless you, Maggie!" said Tony, modestly.

The Overseer muttered something behind his beard, which no one understood; Mary kindly responded to his salutation and pointed him to a chair; while Maggie sprang upon his knee.

He then silently drank his coffee.

Finally the Overseer began: "Did you come on foot from L——?"

"Yes, godfather."

"And have you left your uncle?"

"Certainly; he gave me permission to go."

"And why?"

"Because he thought from the letter, that you had kindly invited me."

“Silly stuff with your letter! You were a fool to come here where no one wants you.”

The blood flushed crimson in the boy's cheeks; he was naturally hasty and very sensitive; but Mistress Mary's eyes so kindly implored him to be patient, that he at once remembered the elf's advice, and quietly replied: “Alas! there surely must have been some mistake concerning the letter; but since I have come so far, my good godfather will perhaps be kind enough to tell me where I will find work and bread.”

“Indeed! Work and bread? That sounds very reasonable! But with such bragging fellows the words are generally the best part, and nothing of any consequence lies behind them. What, then, have you learned?”

“Reading, writing, and arithmetic, the catechism, and singing.”

“We have no call for such learning in Laubbrunn, and your wisdom will not be of the least use to me; but would you like to be a miner?”

“O yes indeed! most gladly, dear, good godfather!” cried Tony, joyfully.

"Well, well, you need not be so hasty; we are not quite so far yet. Fair and softly!—if one gives you a finger, you take the whole hand. Go out now, and feed the dogs."

Tony willingly rose, and strove to win the favor of the powerful pair of animals, which however only set their teeth, and growled fiercely upon him. They utterly refused to follow him, and growled most menacingly.

"Call them by their names,—Castor and Pollux!" said Mary.

The boy did as he was bidden, but the creatures still refused to follow; they rushed wildly about the room, and made such a terrible noise that the Overseer himself seized them by the ears, and, muttering a hasty curse, turned them out of doors.

"You are very expert, my lad!" said he, scornfully.

"Pardon me, the dogs must know me before they will obey me."

"Nonsense! the dogs are very sensible, and when they once find out what a chicken-hearted fellow you are, they will never follow you."

Again did the blood rush to the boy's cheeks ; but fortunately the Overseer immediately continued : " Get ready, then, and come with me to the mine, where you may learn your business ; but quick, I cannot wait ! "

It was a charming summer day ; around the mysterious spring stood a group of laughing and chattering young girls, washing greens, and filling their buckets with the clear water.

The Overseer walked on in silence, and so rapidly, that Tony was forced to run to keep pace with him.

The mine was soon reached, and our good Tony trembled a little as he looked down into the gloomy shaft which lay before him, like a deep, black grave.

At the entrance of the mine stood a number of miners, engaged in drawing up immense chests and barrels attached to huge ropes. Their cheerful voices could be heard from a great distance ; but as soon as they saw the gloomy Overseer coming, they became silent, lifted their caps from their heads, and made their usual salutation : " Good luck ! "

The Overseer made no reply, but examined

the works, and seemed to take real delight in finding all the fault possible, in the loudest and most disagreeable tone of voice.

"Where is Rupert?" asked he.

An old miner stepped forth, the same kind old man who had so often brought Maggie pretty stones from the mine; he asked the Overseer for his commands.

"You must teach this young lad, Rupert. Take him down into the shaft, give him a mining suit, and show him what he has to do. He is a very saucy fellow, so that you must hold him tight, and especially must you administer plenty of wholesome correction."

So saying, the Overseer departed.

"Well, my lad, were you ever a miner?" asked the old man.

"No, dear sir!"

"Were you never down a shaft?"

"Never!"

"By all the elements! you must take courage, then, for I tell you it is not very charming down below there; you will see neither sun nor moon, only gray stones, with here and there a silver vein, which must be hammered

out. There, put on the blouse and the cap; I will hold your light for you until we reach the bottom. Now, — are you ready?”

Tony assented; Rupert led him to the mine and told him to descend the rungs of the ladder which he saw before him. “Take good care! I will go before; when we have gone down twelve steps, the ladder ends, and we must get into a large box, suspended by ropes, while the miners above will wind us down until we again reach solid ground.”

And so it was. The daylight soon vanished. Tony's heart beat loudly, but with Rupert's assistance he courageously stepped into the swinging box which hung at the foot of the ladder. They had scarcely entered when the ropes began to move, and the box slowly sunk into the dark chasm.

“Does your heart beat, my lad?” asked Rupert, laughing; “well, have patience, we will soon be down!”

As soon as the airy equipage touched the bottom of the mine, the pair left it. Tony looked round curiously, but it was some time before he could distinguish anything through

the darkness. His eyes finally became accustomed to the want of light, and he found himself amid a mass of rocks piled up in fantastic hillocks of various sizes, between which the miners wandered like dark shadows, each bearing a small lantern, or stood, and with great exertions hammered or dug out the silver, which was here plentifully distributed in small veins through the gray rock.

The old man placed himself before a block of stone, and bade the boy follow his example. He then began to strike upon the stone, and Tony did likewise. The latter was at first very unskilful; the spade and hammer were heavy and unwieldy, and the boy's arm was soon so tired with the unusual labor, that he could scarcely lift it.

Rupert was good-natured, but rough; he often blustered very noisily, called the boy awkward and spoiled, and told him over and over again, that it needed something more than a handsome face and delicate hands to make a good miner.

"Only have patience with me, I will soon do better," said Tony, gently.

"I believe so, my lad; but *apropos*, how did the Overseer come to take you? It was contrary to his usual fashion, I can tell you!"

"O, he has been very kind to me, because he is my godfather."

"Aha!"

This was the only outward expression which Rupert permitted to his thoughts. He could not but wonder at the conduct of the Overseer, whom he had never before known to commit a generous action.

After a long pause he continued: "If you never were in a mine before, you cannot be aware of all the dangers surrounding us. No? You know nothing of them? You see, my lad, you ought to have considered all that before you came among us! And I tell you, now, that we miners have especial need to recommend our souls every morning to the protection of Heaven, for we know not when we enter the mine whether we will ever see the daylight again or not. The whole hill is filled with hidden water-courses, which sometimes burst their granite bonds and fill a large portion of the shaft with

water. The danger is then very great, and if God did not graciously watch over our safety, we could not endure the constant anxiety. The deeper we are in the mine, the greater is the danger, and therefore they who work below must be especially careful. They know well all the tokens of approaching peril, and sound the alarm-bells; so that if you should hear a monotonous 'Bim, bim,' sounding from below, you must hasten to a ladder and go up as fast as you can. If you do so in time, you may escape the danger; I tell you this that you may be upon your guard, for I feel really sorry to think how ignorantly you have entered upon the laborious calling of a miner."

Tony listened attentively; but he was a bold boy, and the danger did not seem to him so very great, after all.

At the end of a half-hour, Rupert slipped softly away, probably to try the boy's courage, and see if he would not be afraid in such a solitary place; for it was so dark in the mine, that he could only recognize the distant workmen by their lights, which wandered like shining spirits through the gloom whenever the miners changed their places.

Tony scarcely observed that he was alone ; he struck his hammer with all his little might upon the stone, and suddenly, to his great delight, saw a gleaming silver vein shining like a bright ribbon through the rock. " Ah, that is silver ! " cried he, joyfully. " Rupert, dear Rupert, look what a treasure I have found ! "

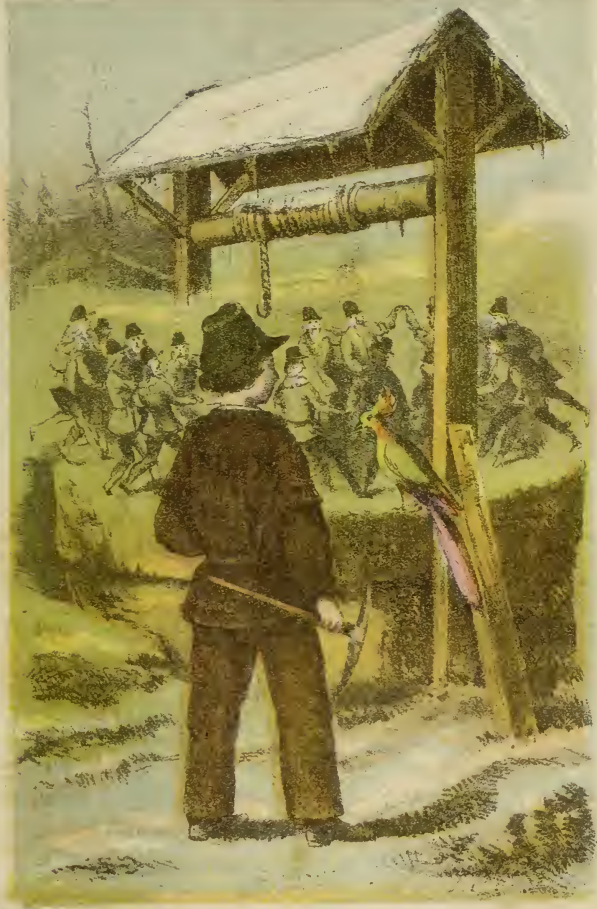
But Rupert was not there.

The boy looked round in astonishment, and when he found himself alone, began to pound the stone with as much force as if he had been an experienced miner. The rock suddenly divided, the silver vein slowly lengthened, displaying the most brilliant colors, and trickled like a murmuring brook, on which a bright sun is shining, forth from the rock. Now it seemed blue, now red, and again glittering with all the colors of the rainbow ; it appeared by turns as flowing water and as solid metal. Through the rustling and murmuring the boy fancied he could distinguish voices, and even singing ; and his breath almost stopped when he finally distinctly heard words which he was sure he had heard before in a dream : —

“In the mine dark and deep,
Bright treasures we keep,
And guard them with unceasing care !
Of crystals the whitest,
Of metals the brightest,
Down in the deep,
How they peacefully sleep,
Those treasures of earth, rich and rare !

“Whom the spirits would serve,
They lead him below ;
As he may deserve,
Their gifts they bestow.
Through the darkness of night
We 'll lead him below,
And dazzle his sight
With the glorious show
Of the treasures we keep
In the mine dark and deep,
Of the treasures of earth, rich and rare !
Good luck !”

Tony gazed intently upon the rock, and every moment expected to see the figures of the elves and gnomes ; but he was disappointed, they did not appear. The glittering, many-colored stream, however, suddenly took another form, and before the boy could tell how it all happened, its place was occupied by a beautiful crimson macaw, with a golden top-



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THE MERRY DANCERS



knot on his head. The bird had a long tail like a bird of paradise, and, strange to say, all his plumage seemed made of colored crystals or pearls, and not of feathers, like that of ordinary birds.

The boy stepped back in amazement.

The bird then began to speak: "Be not afraid, I belong to you; I am the guide promised you by the elf-king; place me on your shoulder that I may be quite near to you."

The bird's voice sounded soft and melodious, like a hymn.

Tony took heart, and lifted the bird from the rock; the macaw's plumage was smooth and cold as crystal. Tony had no sooner placed him on his shoulder, than he caressingly laid his little head against the boy's cheek.

At that moment Rupert returned.

"Come, my lad," said he, "you might have made better use of your time, instead of standing there so idle and lazy, as if you had already performed wonders of industry! Come, work away!"

Tony hastily stooped, lifted his hammer, and wondered not a little that the old man did not seem to perceive the bird.

"Tell me, my lad," said Rupert, mysteriously, "have you seen nothing since I went away?"

Tony gave him a doubtful glance.

"Now you must understand what I mean; we miners have a tradition that little gnomes and elves live down here below. The depths of the earth — so people say — are their especial property, and as they are very angry with men for intruding into their domains and carrying off their treasures, they play all sorts of mad tricks to hinder and torment them. It is also believed, that where the elves are, three little flames like jack-a-lanterns seem to spring out of the rock, and that one may be quite sure when those three flames are seen that the mischievous little creatures have been at some deviltry. Well, just as I was coming to you, I suddenly saw the three flames waving above you, and the elves must certainly have been here; did you see nothing?"

The old man gazed searchingly upon the boy, who blushed scarlet, and replied, stammering with embarrassment: "No, not the least thing!"

"You lie, Tony, you lie!" cried the macaw, in a harsh, croaking voice.

The boy shuddered, and looked appalled.

"Come, come, what frightens you so?" continued Rupert.

"Why, why —"

"Come, tell the truth, my lad; is it not true that you do not believe in elves?"

"No — yes — that is — I think —"

"Tony, do not deny your friend; none but cowards do so!" cried the red bird, in shrill tones.

The boy had by this time recovered himself, and said steadfastly and openly: "I certainly believe that there may be such friendly little elves, who will do us no harm, that is, if we are good, and never disturb them!"

"Bravo, Tony, bravo!" laughed the bird.

It was very strange that Rupert did not hear a single word of all the bird said, especially as he spoke in tones so loud that they were echoed and re-echoed from the rocks.

A short time after, the noon-bell rang, and the miners had a short respite from their wearisome labor.

CHAPTER II.

TONY'S FRIEND LEAVES HIM.

MANY months had passed since Tony's first arrival at Laubbrunn. Summer and Autumn had gone, and Winter now reigned, with his short, melancholy days, and long, tedious nights.

The boy's life in the Overseer's house was often very miserable, and had it not been for Mrs. Steele and dear little Maggie, he would often have found it almost impossible to endure. The Overseer's gloomy tyranny, his ungovernable temper and avarice, rendered life under his roof a real torment. Mary was patient and gentle as an angel, and Maggie, with her lively, childish ways, rarely failed to win a kind glance from her stern father; but Tony was forced to bear the full weight of his wrathful caprices.

He did not love the child, and had long before repented having received him into his house, although Tony was so industrious that he fully earned the little he ate. He had soon been forced to leave his pretty room near the spring that so mysteriously murmured through the darkness of the night. Notwithstanding all Mary's entreaties, he was now forced to sleep in a miserable closet in the garret.

Tony was naturally a good-natured boy, but he had many faults, among which the chief was a certain hastiness of disposition; he readily became excited, and was very touchy, and could not bear the least blame. It was consequently a very hard trial to be forced to listen submissively to all the scolding and insults of an unjust man.

How often did the warning voice of the strange bird resound in his ear, saying: "Patience, Tony, patience! He is no good boy who cannot overcome his faults."

And when the boy would reply: "But I meet with so much injustice! I am only hasty or stubborn because I am misused, and would be very good and patient if I were only kindly

treated!" the bird would answer: "It is precisely because you are tempted, that you must stand firm; your virtue, to be real, must bear the test of trial, and if you are submissive to gentle Mrs. Steele, you deserve no praise; you cannot esteem yourself to possess any virtue, until that virtue has been tried!"

And this, my dear young reader, is a truth, and what the bird says in the legend may be useful to us all in our actual and daily life.

It was not strange that Tony should be mild and obliging towards Mary, Maggie, and even Rupert; for they were all so kind, never saying a single word which could hurt his feelings, that he must have been very bad indeed had he failed to requite their goodness.

When he was first received into his godfather's house, he was enchanted to have found an asylum, and his thanks for the slightest favor were warm and deep, for he had already experienced hunger and want. But later, when he knew that he earned his bread through his labor, he felt a sense of wrong and oppression when the Overseer dealt harshly with him, and especially when

he daily repeated that he only kept him out of charity.

“Ah, were it not for Mrs. Steele and Maggie, I would so dearly love to leave this place!” would he often say to himself; “for the good elf could surely find me elsewhere, and my faithful birdie would not desert me.”

He might securely trust in this last hope, for the red macaw never moved a step away from him; he accompanied him down into the deep mine, patiently sat on his shoulder while he labored, slept at the head of his bed, and was always the first to bid him “Good morning!” when he awoke. If the boy had been patient and good the day before, the voice sounded clear and joyous; but if the bird gave him no greeting, Tony felt quite sure that he was dissatisfied with his conduct.

Tony rose very early in the morning, long before the faintest glimmering of dawn, and joined the miners at the hour of prayer, when they all piously recommended themselves to the care of Heaven, ere they proceeded to their dangerous and laborious duties.

The road to the mine was generally frozen hard, and covered with snow and ice, so that the poor boy's hands and feet were nearly frozen before he reached the shaft. He was there received by Rupert, who had become his best friend, and who bestowed on him a real fatherly care whenever he was able to do so; but of course the old man's powers were very limited, and his only aid frequently consisted in some merry tale, with which he strove to shorten and lighten the boy's arduous and monotonous labor.

It was really peculiar that no one saw the macaw, or heard his voice, except Tony himself.

One evening, Tony was returning very late home from the mine; he was alone, and walked slowly and wearily over the crackling snow which sparkled in the moonlight. The red bird was dancing along before him, beating the snow with his wings, and softly singing.

They thus approached the well, where all was quiet and still; but as the boy and his companion were about passing on, there sud-

denly rose from the interior of the basin a multitude of strange, mist-like little figures, with flowing white beards, and trailing garments. Tony, already quite well acquainted with these strange figures, quickly stepped nearer, and immediately recognized the mountain-elves by their spades and hammers, their pretty miner's caps, and their golden locks. The bird sat on the edge of the well, bowed his head and his top-knot, and began to speak with the elves in some strange and unknown tongue. The latter danced noiselessly round the brink of the well, nodded to the boy, and sang:—

“Beware ! beware !
This night a snare
Will treason dare !”

These same words were continually repeated, the sounds becoming fainter and fainter, until the figures had entirely vanished into the darkness of the night, or had melted into waving wreaths of thin mist.

“I do not know what you mean, you good little elves !” said Tony.

The bird then repeated, in a loud, clear tone:—

“Beware ! beware !
This night a snare
Will treason dare !”

Then away he flew to the Overseer's house.

Tony found his godfather sitting in the little parlor. His face was flushed and heated, and he seemed deeply engrossed with various papers and accounts lying on the table before him ; from time to time he groaned, apparently with impatience and vexation.

“Come here, lad, and help me with my papers. The Superintendent of the mines comes to-morrow to look over the accounts and receipts, and collect the sums due from the mines. Sum up this row of figures !”

The boy did as he was bid ; he had formerly been considered a very good arithmetician, and his industry while at school enabled him to aid his godfather without the slightest difficulty.

The Overseer paid the workmen their scanty wages at the end of every week ; all the money that the mine brought in passed through his hands, and once every year he was obliged to render an account to the Superintendent of all he had received and all he had disbursed.

"Well, lad, you are a mighty long time counting that up," finally growled the Overseer, seeing that Tony again and again reckoned up the sum, but showed by repeated and ominous shakes of the head that all was not right.

"Look, godfather! there is some mistake somewhere," replied Tony; "in the account the income is stated at three hundred florins, but there are only two hundred and fifty in this purse."

"That is very strange, hand me the purse; what kind of money is it?" asked the Overseer.

"Gold-pieces," replied the boy, reaching out the purse.

The old man put out his hand, but not quite far enough, so that the purse fell between them, and the gold-pieces rolled over the floor.

"Well, don't you mean to pick them up?" cried the Overseer; "or do you think, perhaps, that the golden foxes will pick themselves up?"

The boy got down on his hands and knees,

gathered up the gold, which had rolled in every direction, and counted it out upon the table ; there were two hundred and fifty florins.

“ Fifty florins are wanting ! ” cried the Overseer, in a harsh tone ; “ get down and look for them ! ”

“ I have already told you, godfather, that the fifty florins were wanting before the money fell on the floor.”

“ Nonsense ! None of your excuses ! Who knows where you may have hidden the money, you rascal ! There were exactly three hundred florins ! ”

“ But, dear godfather, what do you mean ? I do not understand you,” replied the bewildered boy. “ I tell you there were only two hundred and fifty florins in the purse before it fell ; don’t you remember, you told me to hand it to you that you might see for yourself ? ”

“ Be quiet ! Leave your nonsense ; it will do you no good here ! I tell you, there were three hundred florins in the purse, and not one penny less ; and whatever is wanting now, I must search you for, my lad ; for while you were creeping like a crab over the floor, you

might easily have let four or five gold pieces wander into your own pockets."

Tony was so angry at such an imputation that he could not speak a word. This was indeed too much to bear! What the Overseer meant by such an unreasonable suspicion Tony could not divine, but he felt that some terrible misfortune was now in store for him. He had counted the money three times before the purse fell, and each time the fifty florins were missing; he had told this to the Overseer, who, notwithstanding, had accused him of having taken them, and who now approached him for the purpose of searching his pockets.

"Do not touch me, godfather!" cried the boy, now thoroughly aroused; "there will be some harm done if you touch me!"

"Aha! Is it so, lad? does your guilty conscience torment you already? Why will you not show me your pockets?"

"Because you have expressed a dishonorable and shameful suspicion, which I am sure you do not believe yourself!"

The Overseer laughed contemptuously, and

came still nearer to the indignant boy, who had assumed so bold and defiant a mien, that, however strong the old man might be, it seemed more prudent for him to consider a moment before he entered into an actual struggle.

At that instant a post-coach was heard driving over the crackling snow, and a few moments after, it stopped before the door.

The Overseer grew deathly pale, turned away from the boy, and threw papers, bills, and money into an open closet, which he hastily locked, putting the key in his pocket.

He had scarcely done so when a tall, slender man, enveloped in a fur cloak, entered ; it was the Superintendent, who had come sooner than he had been expected.

The Overseer made an endless number of bows, relieved the stranger of his hat and cloak with his own hands, bade him heartily welcome, and sent Tony to tell Mrs. Steele to prepare a good supper for their honored guest.

The Superintendent, a friendly gentleman, soon made himself very comfortable ; the warm room was very pleasant after so long and cold

a drive, and the sofa-cushions, on which he stretched himself out, afforded a grateful repose to his weary limbs.

As the boy left the room, the stranger said : " A handsome little fellow ! Is he a relative of yours ? "

" No, God be praised ! " replied the hypocritical Overseer.

" Why so ? Is the boy not good ? He looks so candid and upright ! "

" All a mask, nothing but a mask, gracious sir. I also was deceived by the boy's honest, plausible appearance ; but God knows how I have been punished for my confidence ! "

" Well, how ? "

" O, he is a sly deceiver, and all the benefits which I have showered upon him during many months have been repaid with such base ingratitude, that he has actually lied to me and stolen my property. "

" Ah ! may you not be mistaken ? "

" Certainly not, gracious sir, " said the Overseer, who then related several stories of Tony, (pure inventions,) which were so terrible that the Superintendent indignantly turned away

his head, and said : " Why, then, do you tolerate such a young scapegrace under your roof ? "

" Through humanity, gracious sir ; I fear the boy would come to some bad end were I to turn him away, and as he is my godson — "

" Your kindness is praiseworthy, but I must warn you ; if the boy is really as bad as you represent him, you must use severe measures towards him, and not spoil him with over-kindness ; you owe this to his own best interests. But now to our business. You know that I am sent by the government to examine into the income of the mines, and to compare it with the accounts and receipts. "

" I know it, gracious sir, " replied Steele, submissively, " and if you wish, we can begin at once. "

" What are you dreaming of ? I have driven twenty-four miles to-day, over your hilly roads, and feel mortally weary ; to-morrow will be time enough. "

The Overseer bowed, and once more breathed freely ; for my dear young readers will readily understand how little sincerity was in his last proposition.

The guest ate his supper, and soon after retired to the room which Mary had prepared for him.

Tony stood alone in his gloomy attic, with burning tears of bitterness and indignation rolling down his flushed cheeks. And yet the poor boy had not heard the imputations which the wicked Overseer had cast upon his truth and honesty while talking with the Superintendent; had he done so, he would have been really desperate. What could his godfather mean by accusing him of so base a deed? The boy vainly strove to divine the cause of the strange proceeding, and meanwhile walked up and down his room in a state of great excitement, stamping with his feet, and sobbing as if he had lost every hope in the world.

The red bird, Tony's truest friend, sat upon the broken window-sill, gazed a long time with earnest eyes upon the excited boy, and finally said, in gentle tones: "Tony, moderate the violence of your wrath; it cannot justify you, and can do you no good."

The boy shuddered. "Nothing can do me

any good now, for all is lost when I am taken for a thief!"

"All is not lost, boy, if you will only conquer yourself, and govern your temper; consider the whole matter quietly, and justify yourself to-morrow morning to the Overseer, who certainly cannot harbor any evil intentions towards you, and who will soon be convinced of your innocence."

"Harbor no evil intentions?" cried Tony, with flashing eyes; "he, the Overseer? O, he has the worst intentions towards me; he is a tyrannical, violent man, without one spark of good-feeling!"

"You see what ugly faults anger and violence are, and you should therefore strive to free yourself from them as soon as possible!" said the bird.

But Tony was too indignant, too deeply imbittered, to listen to any advice.

"I will leave this house to-morrow, at the first dawn of day!" continued he. "I was quite as happy at my uncle's as I have been since I came here, and there was no need for the elf-king to bring me so far, only to make me miserable!"

The macaw's eyes flashed fire at this inconsiderate speech, and again he repeated warningly, "Tony!"

The boy started; but he was now blinded by the excess of the dangerous failings which he had on that very day wilfully encouraged, until he scarcely recognized himself.

"Tell me, then," cried he, in loud and angry tones, "tell me what I have gained by coming here! Toil and labor the whole day long, constant scolding and mean food, and now this last accusation. I have not one single friend, for you only advise and blame, and no one consoles me! No, no, the mountain-elf has done me no good!"

Scarcely had these rash words left his lips, when he would have given half his life to recall them. The whole room was suddenly filled with leaping yellow flames, which danced upon the floor and walls, and every moment became more fearful and threatening.

The boy stood near the window, and imploringly stretched forth his hands to the red bird; never before had he felt so awe-stricken, so utterly forsaken.

Then, as on the first night of his arrival, the white and foaming waves gushed through his window; the sparkling stream encircled the macaw, which unfolded his shining wings and floated on the surface of the flood, mournfully singing the following words:—

“Farewell! farewell!
Thou hast repelled
Thy truest friend,
Who ever held
Thy good his end!
Farewell!”

The soft, moaning tones had scarcely died away when the bird's form began to grow more and more indistinct, until at length nothing could be seen but a faint play of color, like the reflection of the evening red in a clear river; and before the astonished boy had recovered from his first surprise, the waves had all retreated within the magic well, the mysterious flames had vanished, and all was still and dark around him.

O how sorry poor Tony felt! how he repented his foolish passion! Surely, now the elf-king would never aid him again! Ah! he

had really loved the red bird dearly, for he well knew how kind were all his intentions; even when the faithful monitor angered him, his own benefit was the object sought!

But repentance came too late!

He no longer wept from rage, but from bitter sorrow. He begged and implored the elf-king to send him back his guide; he promised faithfully that he would conquer himself, and be more patient; yes, he would even gently strive to convince the Overseer that his suspicion was unfounded. But all remained silent and motionless round the desolate boy.

As he sadly and solitarily stood at the window, he suddenly perceived a man with a hammer, standing beside the well. He looked more keenly, and soon recognized the Overseer, who slowly lifted a stone from its place in the wall, laid a small purse and a pocket-book in the cavity, and then carefully replaced the stone in its former position; this done, he slipped softly back into the house.

A multitude of strange thoughts flashed at once through Tony's mind, and thus much became clear to him,—that the Overseer feared

the examination on the following day, and that he wished to conceal some papers which he dared not keep in the house.

“O,” suddenly cried Tony, “he may perhaps have accused me because he has himself misused some of the government money!”

This supposition was certainly very near the truth; the Overseer had been very negligent in his stewardship of the mine, and of course had every reason to dread an examination.

It was almost midnight.

Tony's head wearily sank upon the window-sill, and his eyes closed in a short, unrefreshing slumber. Now he heard the red bird's mournful farewell, now he fancied he could distinguish the elf-king's angry voice, and again did the Overseer yell his malicious accusation into his ears. His heart beat anxiously, his pulse was feverish, and great drops of cold sweat stood upon his forehead. He suddenly thought he felt some one shaking him; he opened his eyes, and perceived a brilliant stream of fiery light flooding his room.

He threw up the window, and saw that the

lower story of the house, the sitting-room, was in flames.

"Fire! Fire! Help!" cried he loudly, and then rushed down the steps.

Below, he met the Overseer raging and storming about. Mary and Maggie were in safety without, the servants were all awake, and the neighbors were hastening in to lend their aid. All were scolding, hurrying, and jostling one another; the Superintendent seemed to be the only person retaining his senses.

He boldly opened the door of the burning room, and called out to the Overseer: "Where are the government papers and money, Steele?"

"Yonder, in the closet, gracious sir!" replied Steele, without approaching any nearer; "yonder, near the chimney!"

A rapid glance convinced the Superintendent that a heap of ashes was all that remained of either closet or papers.

The loss was considerable, but the Superintendent was too sensible a man to waste valuable time in useless repinings, and im-

mediately applied himself to the direction of the extinguishing apparatus, which, on account of the mine, was very good at Laubbrunn; at the end of a half-hour the fire was entirely quenched.

The Superintendent then cautiously entered the sitting-room, which, with its torn carpets, charred tables and furniture, and fluttering curtains, looked really desolate. The reflective and experienced officer could not free himself from a very serious suspicion. It seemed strange that the fire should have broken out in the closet; for although it stood very near the chimney, yet the wainscoting between the chimney and the closet was scarcely burned at all, and it was impossible the flames could have overleaped this space, had they proceeded in the first instance from the fireplace.

The Superintendent attentively considered all these facts, could it be possible that Steele had dreaded an examination into his papers, and had himself destroyed them? Mr. Von Behren, the Superintendent, blamed himself, however, for this dreadful suspicion; Steele had hitherto proved himself perfectly trust-

worthy, and it seemed unchristian to suspect him now.

As Mr. Von Behren still stood reflecting, his eyes wandered towards the nearest window, and there fell upon a ball of thread dipped in sulphur, and several matches.

There could no longer be any doubt that the room had been purposely fired, and the matches and thread forgotten in the incendiary's hasty retreat.

At that moment the Overseer, tortured by his guilty conscience, entered the room. One look convinced him that he was betrayed, and his wicked heart inspired him to throw the blame upon another before he was himself accused.

He quickly recovered his composure, approached Mr. Von Behren with a mysterious air, and before that gentleman had time to express his suspicions, the Overseer said, in firm and decided tones: "Gracious sir, if I am not very much deceived, this has been the work of an incendiary."

Mr. Von Behren looked up in astonishment, and, without giving any indication of his own

sentiments, quietly said: "Why do you think so?"

"Because it is strange that this closet should be entirely consumed while the wainscoting is so little injured; the fire could not have arisen in the closet unless some one had purposely placed combustible matter in or near it."

The Superintendent gazed a moment upon the deceiver's countenance; it was strange that the very man whom he had just suspected should be the first to utter his own thoughts.

"You make a heavy charge upon some one, Steele," said Mr. Von Behren, solemnly; "think well of what you are doing!"

"I know that, but I also know that I am now upon the right track. Your lordship will remember that I complained yesterday of the young lad — my godson —"

"Certainly; well, what then?"

"Why, only yesterday I missed fifty florins which he had stolen from me while aiding me with my accounts."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Certainly, I found them in his clothes."

"But what could have induced the boy to be wicked enough to set fire to the house?"

"Revenge, probably, because I caught him stealing, and also, perhaps, to injure me with your lordship."

The Overseer continued to speak upon the same subject until Mr. Von Behren's suspicions were quite firmly fastened upon Tony. Amongst other things, he said that at the first alarm Tony had made his appearance completely dressed, and consequently could not have been aroused from sleep by the cry of fire.

Alas! no one knew how Tony had suddenly been overcome by sleep while weeping for his lost friend.

Nothing could have served the Overseer's purpose better than the fact of his having maligned his little godson the evening before. The Superintendent commanded the chief magistrate of the place to be sent for, and the boy meanwhile to be closely imprisoned.

When Tony finally understood what it all was about, he seemed actually petrified with terror. His rage had cooled down; he was

dumb, and pale as death, and it was some moments before he could recover himself sufficiently to ask: "And who, good heavens! who deems me capable of such a crime?"

"I," said the Overseer. "I, who know that you can both lie and steal."

Mary and Maggie sobbed aloud.

But Tony now recovered his self-possession; the blue veins in his forehead suddenly swelled, and a hot glow flushed his cheeks. He stepped directly before the Overseer, and said, firmly: "Is it you, my godfather, who have blackened my character? All is clear then; for what care you to bring ruin on a poor orphan boy, if you can only justify yourself? I, godfather, have no need to kindle fires in order to destroy disorderly papers and false accounts, — but you?"

The Overseer was outrageous, and seized the boy by the shoulder, shaking him so roughly that he groaned aloud. Nevertheless, he boldly continued: "You need not all look so disconcerted, as if I had lost my senses; if you come with me to the well, I can prove the truth of my assertion."

The Overseer suddenly became as white as a sheet.

"What is that about the well?" cried the Superintendent, quickly.

"O, there are some papers there which the Overseer saved from the fire, and hid under a stone."

The Overseer could no longer control himself. Mr. Von Behren commanded the boy to prove his assertion, and all hastened to the well.

Steele followed with trembling limbs. It was now early dawn; a cloudy, melancholy winter's day added to the gloom which already weighed upon the spirits of all present.

Ere Tony reached the well, Mrs. Steele approached, and whispered in imploring tones: "Do not ruin us, Tony."

The poor woman had divined her husband's guilt; for to her, who knew him well, he already looked like a condemned criminal.

The boy started at the sound of Mary's voice; his tender heart was deeply touched. Maggie also hung weeping on his arm, but of course the little girl could not comprehend what all the trouble was about.

Tony stood hesitating what he should do;

but now he could not screen the Overseer without drawing the suspicion of all upon himself.

“ Well, boy, where are the papers ? ” cried the Superintendent.

Tony still hesitated ; he sought Mary’s eyes with an imploring glance, which plainly said : “ Alas, I cannot do otherwise ! ” Mary had turned away, sobbing.

The Superintendent became still more urgent ; he drew the boy forward and said : “ Make haste, and prove what you have said, or we will think you have told us a falsehood, and your punishment will be three times as severe.”

Tony was still silent ; conflicting feelings warred in his bosom. Were he to proceed no further, all the blame would fall upon his own head, and he would be branded as a thief ; but Mary and Maggie would be saved, and the Overseer would continue as before in his present position.

The sacrifice was too great. The Overseer had too bitterly tormented and belied him ; Tony could not forgive and suffer for his ene-

my; that seemed to him too much for any one to ask.

A moment after, he lifted the loose stone from its place in the wall. But, wonderful to relate! in the cavity lay some loose pebbles and an old miner's cap.

A strange sound, as of foaming waters, was heard below in the well; mocking laughter fell upon the boy's ears, and he could not mistake the soft and melancholy tones of a voice, saying:—

• “Farewell! farewell!
Thou hast repelled
Thy truest friend,
Who ever held
Thy good his end!
Farewell!”

The boy's uplifted arms fell powerless at his side; he felt that his friends, the elves, had entirely forsaken him, and that they had destroyed his proofs in order to ruin him.

“Are those your proofs?” asked the Superintendent, indignantly.

The boy was silent.

The next moment he was taken to prison,

and the Overseer, with many apologies and expressions of esteem, led back to his house.

But Steele himself was still pale and anxious ; he divined that some strange hand had interfered in his affairs ; for he knew too well that, in the very spot where the cap and pebbles lay, he had only a few hours before placed money and papers which he had intended to keep for himself.

CHAPTER III.

TONY'S FRIEND RETURNS.

MANY days and many nights had passed away. Tony was still a captive in the gloomy prison at Laubbrunn, and seemed to have been entirely forgotten by his judges ; he was not called up for trial. One endless day passed after another, and he never saw the light of a human countenance. Every morning he found bread and water standing by his bedside, but he never beheld the hand that brought them. Poor boy ! How desolate he felt, how utterly forsaken !

During the first few days he was depressed and quiet, he then became impatient, and finally outrageous with passion ; he shook the door until the bolts rattled loudly, but no one came to his aid. He sometimes thought that

all this might only be a trial on the part of the elf-king ; but he felt too bitterly to allow himself to dwell upon this possibility. He was angry with his former friend, and thought of him only with unkind feelings. Misfortune had thus far exercised no beneficial influence upon Tony's disposition, and he now especially needed a friend who would advise him to patience and resignation. For my dear reader will doubtless have learned long ago, that no suffering, of whatever kind it may be, can be relieved by impatience. On the contrary, we always feel it doubly when we refuse to be pliant and submissive.

How did it benefit Tony that he always thought more and more angrily and unforgivingly of the Overseer, and that he continually renewed in his mind the image of the wrongs and injustice he had endured ? All this did him no good ; it did not render him more contented, and in no degree diminished the evils of his actual condition, and yet it was quite certain that his outraged friends would only again aid him when he really deserved their assistance.

He had no desire to think of Mary and Maggie.

One evening he stood by the narrow window of his cell, and leaned his hot cheek against the iron lattice. He looked out into the dim twilight, and only indistinctly perceived in the far distance the mysterious well. Then sorrow and longing suddenly filled his heart, all rancor vanished, and he sighed as he said, with tears in his eyes: "O if I could only see my dear little birdie once more! He was indeed a true friend!"

All at once he thought he heard a voice ascending from below; he forced his head through the iron bars, to look down. He saw nothing, but what was his amazement to find that one of the bars was broken, and moved to one side. He shook it forcibly with both hands, and lo! the iron bar fell to the ground.

Tony was wild with joy, for the opening was quite large enough to suffer his slight figure to pass through. He examined the height, which he found to be about seven feet from the ground; the earth was still covered with a soft coating of snow. He jumped out,

and a moment after lay below. His lips bled, and he was otherwise slightly bruised : he had fallen upon a sharp stone ; but he cared little for such petty scratches, for he was at length free.

He thankfully lifted his hands to the cloudy heavens, which hung over the landscape like a gray pall. His heart beat lightly and joyfully, and he hastened through the snow-covered fields, as if he had been pursued by a host of enemies.

He hurried on during several hours. A heavy snow-storm finally impeded his advance ; the thick flakes fell like needles upon his unprotected face and head. He was lightly clothed, and trembled like an aspen-leaf in the night-wind ; his hair hung wet and icy cold over his beating temples.

“ I must rest ! ” cried he, finally exhausted. But far or near no shelter could he see ; above him rose the bare, giant branches of the leafless trees, and all the bushes were covered with icicles, which tore the poor boy's hands. Alas ! this was no happy state of freedom !

He struggled with his excessive fatigue, but

did not know that sleeping on the cold snow might cause his death. He finally sank upon the ground, and after a few moments slumbered soundly.

When he again opened his eyes, he thought he must be under the influence of some heavenly dream, so peaceful and happy was all around him.

His weary limbs reposed upon a soft couch, and snow-white pillows supported his head. Around the bed hung ample curtains of white muslin, and the bright flames in the chimney-place threw waving, golden reflections upon the snowy drapery. Near the bed was a little table with twisted wooden legs, on which stood cooling drinks, and a small lamp of polished brass. Not far from the table was a high-backed arm-chair covered with black velvet, in which sat an old lady dressed in a dark woollen gown and a lace cap. She held a prayer-book, bound in black velvet, in her hand, and read assiduously.

As soon as she perceived that the boy had moved, she laid aside her book, and said

kindly : " Ah ! you are awake at last, my little fellow. You have occasioned us much anxiety ; but that seems to be all over now, for you look as gay and lively as a meadow lark."

" But where then am I ?" cried Tony, astonished.

The woman laughed, and replied : " With people who have the best intentions towards you ; therefore set your mind at rest, and do not fear. My son, who is a hunter in this forest, found you two nights ago, lying on the snow asleep, and almost frozen. He brought you here in his arms, and we employed every means in our power to rouse you ; our efforts were long in vain, but finally you awoke. Your pulse, however, was very high, and you talked all kind of stuff about prisons and elves, a magic well, and an Overseer. Those were of course only phantasms occasioned by fever."

" No, indeed, good lady ! it was all true," whispered Tony, sadly.

The good old woman feared that the fever had returned ; she advised the boy to remain very quiet, gave him a cooling drink, and

sang him a little song, during which he fell asleep, for he was very feeble.

But after a few days he recovered his strength entirely, and thereby delighted the kind hearts of his new friends.

Anselm, the young hunter, said to him: "My lad, if you wish to stay where you are, and would like to be a hunter, you may remain with us, for I am sure my good mother will willingly take care of you."

Dame Gunilla nodded a kind assent to this proposition, and Tony was only too happy. He now began an entirely new mode of life.

Gunilla was an excellent old lady, who lived with her son in a state of great seclusion, but who, nevertheless, had the warmest sympathies for all her fellow-beings.

The boy's sad tale, and his desolate condition, touched her deeply, although she could not but acknowledge the extent of his faults, and her efforts were now all directed towards reconciling him with the Overseer. She wished to undertake the direction of the boy's mind, as her son had done the care of his body.

The hunter's dwelling stood quite alone in a thick wood, which in summer was truly charming, but which now groaned beneath a heavy covering of snow and ice; the little house, with its red brick walls, was sheltered and protected without by the huge oak at whose foot it was built, and within it looked so quiet and peaceful that Tony felt quite happy.

He went hunting, helped to fell trees, and made himself so useful that Anselm was highly pleased with him. In the evening they all sat round the fireplace in Gunilla's little parlor, talking with one another, and Tony soon learned to call the good old woman by the tender name of "mother."

"Listen, my child," said she one evening; "what is the name of the place where you lived?"

"Laubbrunn, dear mother."

"Strange that I never should have heard the name before; do you know the place, Anselm?"

"I have never been there," replied the son; "but I have been told it lies some forty-

eight miles from here among the mountains."

"But that cannot be so, dear Anselm," cried the boy, "because I only walked during one night."

"O you only fancy so!" laughed the hunter.

"Certainly not; it is true I ran as if Death himself were at my heels, for I was afraid of that shameful Overseer."

Gunilla shook her gray head reprovingly, and said: "Have you no milder term to apply to your godfather, Tony?"

The boy's cheeks glowed.

"No, no, I can never speak mildly of him!" cried Tony; "he has robbed me of everything, even of my good name, and it was his fault that my little friend left me."

"No, my child, you are mistaken," replied the old woman; "you do as too many men are in the habit of doing; you blame others for your own faults. Your protector took away your little friend in consequence of your own violence and ingratitude; and even if the latter were merely momentary, you can thus see how easily one fault leads to another;

for had you not been blinded by anger, you would never have uttered such thankless and inconsiderate words."

Tony blushed; he felt that Gunilla spoke the truth; nevertheless, he could not refrain from saying: "But the magic bird certainly asked too much from me. How can one be good and gentle when one is so tormented?"

"It is only then, my child, that patience and gentleness become virtues; for if you are praised and rewarded, you deserve no recompense for being mild and good. But when you are thus towards those who injure you, then are you really virtuous; and your little friend by no means asked too much of you when he desired you to have patience with your godfather."

Tony felt that Gunilla was quite right, but he thought it must be very difficult to be so good and virtuous as she proposed.

"It is indeed not easy, my child, because it is always difficult to overcome our faults and weaknesses; but the more needful is it always to renew our efforts, and especially to banish all hatred and malice from our souls."

The winter was now over, and the beautiful spring called all the birds and flowers from their long sleep. Life again awoke round the little house, which stood as in a blooming wreath of perfumed shrubs and flowers. The larks sang joyfully in the morning light, sparrows and wagtails bathed their little feet in the brook, and tried to outsing the thrushes and red-breasts. Squirrels and deer gambolled amid the trees and upon the grass, while the clumsy tree-frogs leaped merrily amid the damp turf. Wondrously strange and beautiful was the life which had sprung up in the forest and on the meadow, and Tony thought he had never been so happy before. His only desire now was to be reconciled with the good elf, and to show him that he had really loved his little guide. But he neither saw nor heard anything of either elf or bird, and feared they had for ever forsaken and forgotten him.

Tony had become very skilful in the discharge of his duties, and vastly preferred the labor of a forester in the fresh, green wood, under the free canopy of heaven, to that of a miner, in the dark and gloomy recesses of the earth.

He perfectly understood the management of his little gun, and could also oversee the wood-cutters and day-laborers. Anselm often praised Tony, and called him his active, industrious little lad.

One afternoon, near twilight, Tony, with his gun over his shoulder, came singing and whistling towards the house. As he crossed the broad wagon-road leading through the forest, he perceived a miserable-looking beggar sitting by the way-side. The poor fellow seemed ill and weary, for he groaned like a dying man and wept aloud. The boy was about to hasten to him; but at that moment Anselm appeared, and compassionately approached the poor creature. The latter looked up, and Tony, who stood unobserved behind a thick willow-tree, nearly screamed aloud, for the sick beggar was none other than his godfather.

The boy drew noiselessly back and listened as Anselm said: "You seem to be suffering from exhaustion, and perhaps from hunger! Come with me; I will take you to my house and provide for all your wants."

"I cannot follow you; my foot is very sore, and I have been wandering in this wilderness for the last three days," replied the Overseer, lifting his hollow eyes to the forester's kind face.

Anselm gave a look of surprise; how could the beggar call the pleasant little wood, with its birds and flowers, a wilderness. The young hunter did not divine, that to an evil conscience every path seems rough and thorny, and every place appears a desert. He thought the beggar must be very ill, and, good-naturedly offering him his arm, said: "Lean upon me, good old man; I will aid you, and we will soon reach my dwelling, where you will find refreshment and repose."

The Overseer rose slowly and painfully from the ground; and as he took the young man's proffered arm, he said: "O, how long it is since I have been kindly spoken to! All shun me in my poverty and misery; but indeed I have deserved no better treatment."

The hunter threw his powerful arm around the poor old man, and, thus supported, the latter was enabled slowly to approach the little

house. Tony, however, remained behind, while good and evil angels struggled for the victory in his childish bosom. The good persuaded him to a reconciliation with the man who had so wronged him; the evil, on the other hand, bitterly reminded him of all he had suffered, and whispered, "Your wicked godfather will be served quite right if he is now forced to learn the miseries of poverty and misfortune."

Tony felt deeply all the advice given him by his little guide, and all that Gunilla had said to him; but he was not yet good enough to be willing entirely to forgive and forget all the painful past. Even when he had reached the house, he had not decided upon his course of conduct.

Since the eventful night of the fire, nothing had prospered with the Overseer. The young reader knows that he had really abstracted the money and concealed it in the wall surrounding the well, and that he had also purposely fired the house and burned the closet. The elf-king, in order to try the boy and strengthen his virtue, had destroyed the proofs which would otherwise have ruined the Overseer; but

the latter was not yet saved, for he was continually tortured by his guilty conscience, and he knew well that whoever had played him the trick of exchanging the purse for an old miner's cap must be a bitter and powerful enemy.

His thought left him no peace by day or by night, and he became as pale as a ghost. The Superintendent also mistrusted him, for he could find no satisfactory explanation of the Overseer's evident depression and anxiety on that fearful night.

One evening, about two weeks after the fire, the Superintendent accidentally stood by the mysterious well; he suddenly perceived a tall, thin miner standing near him, whose countenance shone mildly and kindly in the moonlight. The stranger silently pointed to the stone which Tony had vainly removed from the wall, and lo! it rolled out of its own accord, and with it fell a pocket-book and a purse of shining gold.

The Superintendent lifted them from the ground, and held the full proofs of Steele's guilt in his hands; but he could not yet un-

derstand it all, and turned to his silent companion in search of an explanation. But the pale miner had vanished.

Steele could no longer deny the truth; his uneasy conscience betrayed him; he acknowledged his guilt, lost his place, and only through flight escaped a more severe punishment. But ere he went, he learned that Tony's prison was empty, and that the boy had escaped. The image of the little godson whom he had betrayed constantly pursued him; day and night he heard the boy's melancholy lamentations, and nowhere could he find peace or rest. Tony's cry of horror, when brought forward and accused of such grievous misdeeds, rang continually in his ears.

Weeks and months passed, and he was still a homeless wanderer on the face of the earth. The little house in the forest lay in truth at the distance of several days' journey from Laubbrunn, so that the elf-king must himself have aided our Tony.

Mary and Maggie lived alone in a small village, where the former earned her daily bread by spinning.

It was quite dark before Tony entered the house; and as he had not yet determined how he would meet his godfather, he paused in the entry near the door of the sitting-room, which chanced to be open. The boy looked in and saw the Overseer sitting in a low chair, and eagerly eating some warm broth which Gunilla had prepared for him. He was very pale and thin, but his eyes glowed with excitement, and he seemed to have just finished his melancholy history, for he added: "O, if my mind were only at rest about the boy; if I only knew whether he lived and could forgive me! Sometimes when I had lain awake during the whole night, tormented by anxiety and sorrow, and finally towards morning fell asleep, I would hear strange, whispering voices,—such as they say the elves have,—saying: 'When Tony forgives you, your misery will have an end!'"

"What was the boy's name?" cried Anselm and Gunilla, breathless.

"Tony," was the answer.

Mother and son looked significantly at one another, but did not say how near the boy

was, because they wished first to prepare him, and were not sure that he would return home during the evening; for when the weather was mild, Tony frequently slept in the woods.

But he had heard all, and his heart beat loudly and stormily; he hastened into the garden, for he did not dare to enter the room while he was so fearfully excited. He sat down in his favorite place, under a tall lilac-bush, and leaned his head upon his hand. It is said that sleep dwells amid the fragrant blossoms of the lilac, and that all who rest under its branches must sleep. I do not know if that be really the case; but, however, Tony soon fell into a deep slumber.

He was suddenly awakened from a series of perplexing dreams by the sound of a low, sweet strain of music, he opened his eyes; it must have been near midnight, for all the lights in the cottage had been extinguished, but the stars were beaming down from heaven like friendly angels' eyes, and the moonlight trembled over the blooming shrub. The strain continued. Tony looked up longingly among the branches, and lo! his presentiment had not

deceived him, for on one of the lowest limbs sat the magic bird.

The boy cried out with joy, and raised his hand toward the bird. But the macaw flew out of his reach, and said: "I am not yours yet, Tony; I must first know whether you deserve me."

"O, what shall I do that you may again become mine, and my friend as before?" cried the boy.

"Have you done all that I desired you to do?" asked the bird.

The boy was silent.

"Remember the Overseer!" said the warning voice; "can you not yet forgive him? Can you not renounce your bitter feelings?"

Tony's heart suddenly melted with tenderness and joy; tears stood in his eyes, and he sobbed aloud, saying: "Yes, yes, I can forgive him; I know now, and have long known, that you advised me for my own benefit, and am now determined to be good, and to follow all your instructions."

Scarcely had he said the words, when the bird flew down, lighted on the shoulder of the

happy boy, laid his little head against his cheek, caressed him, and loudly carolled for joy.

“I am now content, my son,” suddenly said a soft voice, and the tall, pale miner, the king of the mountain-elves, stood before Tony, who joyfully threw himself at the feet of his kind friend. “You have now recovered my love and favor, you have heroically struggled with your worst faults, and the more severe the combat, the more honor you deserve. You will now be happy, whereas, if you had yielded to your failings, your portion in life would have been one of bitterness and sorrow. I will also now forgive your godfather, as you have done, and his misery will end when you have assured him of your kind feelings towards him. You must keep your little feathered friend as a remembrance from me; henceforth he will neither warn nor blame, but will merely assist you with his counsel, which will always be the best you can find. Farewell, my child, and never cease to walk in the good way on which you have now entered.”

Before Tony could reply, the elf-king had





Power's & Weller's Lith Boston.

THE RETURN.

vanished; but the red bird sat upon his shoulder, spread out its variegated feathers, and rejoiced with the larks which had just awaked from their light slumbers, for the day had meanwhile broken.

When the Overseer opened his eyes, he fancied himself still pursued by the tormenting images of his evil dreams, and lifting his hand to his face, as if to shut out the sight of Tony, who stood before him, he cried: "Is it your spirit, poor boy, which thus pursues me?"

"Ah, God forbid, dear godfather! It is I, myself, your little Tony, who will no longer remember that you once could not bear him. I will work for you that you may become strong and healthy, and we will go and bring Mrs. Steele and dear Maggie here. What great eyes the sweet little girl will make, when she sees the wood and the beautiful flowers!"

It was a long time before the Overseer fully recovered from his surprise, or could be brought to understand Tony's generosity.

All now went well; Gunilla and Anselm arranged the prettiest little rooms for the

Overseer and his family; Mary soon regained her color in the fresh air of the forest, and Maggie became as lively and happy as ever. The Overseer also recovered his health, and with health came cheerfulness and energy. He never returned to the mine, but Anselm gave him work sufficient to maintain himself and his family. He labored industriously, and never again fell back into his old faults.

But Tony was the gayest and happiest among them all; he was always patient and good, and the elf-king remained his protector to the last hour of his life.

And now, my dear young readers, I wish you all such a friend as Tony possessed in his magic bird. The good macaw found little to blame, but could lighten all the boy's labor by bringing him good fortune, peace, and joy; for the elf-king had conferred this power upon his messenger, and the good bird discharged all his duties faithfully.

Tony's trials were thus all finally ended, and he became as contented and happy as any little boy could wish to be.

THE DEAR RECKONING.

A TRUE STORY.

THE DEAR RECKONING.

ONE fine summer afternoon, a handsome hunting-carriage was seen on the road leading to Bordeaux, apparently hastening towards some secure shelter from the thunder-storm which was darkening the heavens, and momentarily threatening to burst upon the travellers.

In the carriage sat two young men, of about twenty years of age; the one upon the right had dark, fiery eyes, and curly, black hair. He was evidently a Frenchman; his name was Ferdinand Maria, Duke of Orleans, and he was the eldest son of Louis Philippe, then king of France.

The fair-haired young man at his side was his aide-de-camp. They had both been spend-

ing some weeks in Bordeaux, and were just returning from a hunting-party.

"It is of no use, Josselin, the storm will surely overtake us!" said the Dauphin, laughing.

"At all events, your Royal Highness, it will not be the first storm which has wet our locks," replied M. de Josselin, in the same lively tone.

The Duke responded: "Aha! my friend, you are thinking of the storm which greeted us as we entered Rouen, and washed away all the arches erected in our honor! Well, indeed that storm was by no means to be regretted, for it decently relieved us from all the ceremonies and harangues awaiting our arrival. Happy men, to be delivered from such wearisome displays!"

The young men continued their conversation in the same strain, while the coachman encouraged his steeds to increase their speed, and the two huntsmen on the back seat of the carriage drew their cloaks closely round them, to protect themselves from the cold wind, now blowing quite freshly.

The rain still delayed, and all seemed propitious to an escape from the storm, when

suddenly the vehicle slipped to one side, and a loud crack warned the travellers that something was amiss. The Prince sprang out, followed by Josselin and the huntsmen. A moment later, the carriage fell on its side. The Prince himself examined into the cause of the overthrow, and found that a pin had broken which it would require but a few moments to have repaired. His dark eye glanced rapidly over the surrounding country, and perceiving a small village at a short distance, he gave orders to drive the carriage very slowly thither in search of a wheelwright. He followed on foot, accompanied by his aide-de-camp and the two huntsmen. A sharp wind whistled through the grain-fields, and the heavy golden ears bowed their graceful heads before the blast. The sound was like the murmuring of many waves, and one might have fancied one's self near the majestic Garonne, which here winds for so many miles between the most blooming and luxuriant banks.

The Duke of Orleans was very lively; he jested with his companion over their little adventure, and it almost seemed as if he pre-

ferred meeting the storm under the open vault of heaven, for he walked very leisurely, so that the carriage was nearly ready by the time he reached the village.

The wheelwright was a very simple-hearted, good-natured man, whom zeal in the discharge of his professional duties had at that moment rendered very red in the face, — a redness which would not have at all diminished had he known what noble guests were approaching his dwelling.

Near the door sat the wheelwright's wife, spinning. Her well-worn, faded clothing showed that her husband's business was not very lucrative in the little village, through which few travellers passed, and where his services were but seldom needed. By her side sat a young girl, whose countenance seemed darkened by some sorrow, and who retired as the gentlemen approached.

The young Duke courteously saluted the old woman, and sought by opening a conversation with her to shorten the time which still remained, as the wheelwright continued to hammer busily and noisily on.

Dame Jaqueline became very talkative and confidential; the Duke was highly amused with her volubility, and while Josselin went to overlook the wheelwright, Ferdinand asked: "Was the pretty blonde maiden your daughter, my good woman?"

"No sir, my niece; her name is Juliet, and she is a poor orphan, but a good and gentle girl; our priest says she is the best child in the parish."

"Why, then, does she seem so sad?"

The old woman looked important, and replied mysteriously: "Do you see that tall, proud-looking man who is now standing by my Frank?"

The Duke looked up, and saw a figure standing near the wheelwright which impressed him very unfavorably; it was that of a tall, thin man, whose face had a most arrogant and disdainful expression. The stranger's short nose stood high in the air, and his lips were scornfully curled, as if he fancied himself better than all the rest of the world. He met the Prince's glance with an air of superciliousness which plainly showed

the little regard he felt for a fellow human being. Of course he did not divine the young man's rank, as Ferdinand was plainly dressed, and without orders or decorations of any kind.

The old woman continued: "You see, dear sir, the man is an innkeeper in the next town; indeed, to look at him, you would think him at least a prince or a duke, he is so haughty."

Ferdinand laughed heartily at this remark, and the dame proceeded: "Mr. Bertram — that is his name — has a son, Harry, who is as good and friendly as his father is the contrary, for he most fortunately resembles his mother, who was a cousin of mine. Now, only think of it! Harry loves my pretty Juliet, and would willingly marry her, for he does not care how poor his bride is. The good young man! He has brought a great deal of trouble upon his head, for his father is very angry, and has sworn that his son shall marry no maiden who cannot bring him a dowry of at least two thousand francs. Only think of that, sir, two thousand francs! And if my husband were to work day and night, and I were to spin as long, we could never earn so much, no matter how tenderly

we loved our dear Juliet, or how her tears grieved us; for since that harsh determination she has become very pale and sickly, and so has Harry."

Duke Ferdinand listened attentively, and asked: "What is the name of the town where Bertram keeps his inn?"

"L——s, dear sir; it lies on the main road, about a half-mile from here; you must pass through it on your way to Bordeaux."

"And what does he call his inn?"

"The Golden Fox."

"But how comes it that the old fox is here now, when he must surely be angry with you all?" asked the Duke.

"O he certainly never would have come here had he not been forced, by an accident very much like yours, to apply to my old Frank for assistance."

Juliet again entered the room; her appearance gave evidence of the truth of her aunt's account; she looked mild and good, but her dark eyes were very sorrowful. The Duke begged her for a glass of water, and she hastened out to bring it.

When she returned, he asked her many questions, to which she gave modest and sensible answers; but she soon left him, taking with her the spinning-wheel, which could no longer be safely left out of doors, as the rain seemed now very near.

The wheelwright had meanwhile finished his work, and the Duke's carriage was again ready for use. When M. de Josselin offered to pay him, the honest old man asked such an incredibly small sum that the young baron laughed, and said: "But indeed we cannot pay you so small a sum as two francs, we have not the change with us; reckon it up again, my good old fellow, your labor is certainly worth more than two francs."

The honest man was quite astonished at the young gentleman's generosity, but he nevertheless conscientiously replied: "Sir, although I am very poor and sorely in want of money, yet I must tell the truth, and I am quite sure that two francs is quite enough for all I have done."

"My good friend, you must reconsider the matter," said Josselin, good-naturedly, "and

you must make out another account; you may safely do so, for the gentleman is rich, and I tell you in confidence that he is — a prince.”

Old Frank and the landlord of the Golden Fox, who stood near, listening, opened their eyes, and made a profusion of bows. Frank suffered himself to be persuaded, and after the lapse of a few moments, Josselin, making a great effort to repress his laughter, gave his lord the following remarkable account, the result of Frank's efforts:—

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| 1. To mending one carridge for his Hiness . . . | 2 francs. |
| 2. To creeping twice under the carridge . . . | 3 “ |
| 3. To creeping out again | 2 “ |
| 4. To one terribel nock on the head | 3 “ |

Total, 10 francs.

In spite of Frank's masterly system of reckoning, he could think of nothing more to be added to the account. Duke Ferdinand paid the sum twice over, carefully placed the bill in his pocket-book, that he might at some other time fully enjoy its originality, then sprang into his carriage, waved a friendly adieu to the old woman and Juliet, who stood

at the window, and cried out in a loud tone to his coachman: "Drive to L——s as fast as you can, and stop at the Golden Fox; I will remain there all night. I hear the Fox gives excellent lodgings!"

I wish, my dear young reader, you could have seen Bertram; he was perfectly electrified at the thought that a noble prince, whose generosity he had just witnessed, was about to honor his dwelling with his presence; the avaricious old fellow was delighted.

Bertram's simple vehicle was soon in readiness, and he hastened homeward in order to greet his noble guest as speedily as possible.

On the way he considered how he could turn the generous prince's visit to the best account, and muttered to himself, with a very self-confident air, "At all events, I understand the picking of a golden bird much better than that old fool of a Frank!"

The Prince's equipage, meanwhile, flew like an arrow over the plain; the black horses scarcely touched the ground with their hoofs, and the towers of L——s were soon in view.

But the storm now burst upon them in all

its fury ; the lightning darted like fiery serpents amid the black clouds which covered the evening sky ; the thunder roared and rattled, while the rain poured in torrents, and the wind blew as if old Boreas himself were out for a holiday.

M. de Josselin closed the carriage windows ; the huntsmen drew their cloaks still more closely about them, and the coachman strove with voice and whip to give wings to his tired steeds.

The city gate was finally reached ; near the entrance was seen a brilliant sign hanging over a large door ; it represented a great golden fox with a bushy tail and a fine pair of ears ; the whole was evidently the production of a bold pencil, for the paint on the fox's golden fleece was at least an inch thick.

“ Here we are ! ” cried the Duke, gayly leaping out of the carriage.

His companions followed.

A young man of agreeable appearance and handsome countenance stood in the door-way. He gave the strangers a polite welcome, and led them up a creaking stairway into the best

chamber in the house, for he at once recognized the travellers as persons of rank.

The Duke took possession of a pretty little room, simply furnished, but very clean and neat; its only ornament was a vase of fresh flowers standing on the window-sill.

"Are you the host?" asked the Duke, in those winning tones which in after times won him so many hearts.

"I am his son, gracious sir," replied the young man.

"Ah, Mr. Harry Bertram!"

"Do you know my name, sir?" cried Harry, astonished.

"Certainly, my friend, and it is fortunate that I met you, for I bear you a greeting."

Harry laughed incredulously, and stammered: "I really do not know, sir, who —"

"The greeting was confided to my keeping by the pretty lips of a fair young maiden; come, come, Harry, you need not blush so! Juliet sent you a greeting, and also bids you hope, for all will yet be well. I do not know exactly what she meant," added the Duke, with an innocent air, "but it will nevertheless

be very prudent to follow her advice, for hope is a friendly star in every trouble; God himself has placed it in our souls, to guide us through the darkness of human woes. Follow Juliet's advice; you will find it to your advantage."

Harry did not know exactly how it was, but the handsome stranger's speech made a wonderful impression on him, and his countenance, usually so melancholy, became quite serene, and even joyful.

Meanwhile old Bertram arrived, wet to the skin, and without his wig, which the wind had blown far away, out of his reach. He had no time, however, to indulge in any manifestations of ill-temper; he was too highly enchanted to find the noble strangers really lodged in his inn, and too busy in donning his Sunday suit and in issuing various orders, to remember the inconveniences he had endured. He did the honors of his house with innumerable bows and fine speeches, and wearied the Duke's patience with the silliest nonsense he had ever listened to.

The landlord was quite provoked when the

prince ordered a simple cup of tea for his supper; the old fellow could not exactly see how he was to derive any very great advantage from all he could decently charge for such ordinary fare.

And yet he was determined that some monstrous, some unheard-of advantage must be the consequence of so rare a visit.

Early on the following morning, the Duke's carriage stood before the door, the sun shone out clear and warm, and every trace of the storm had vanished. The young Duke was ready to depart; and only waited for his bill.

Old Bertram entered, with his customary salutations to the great; his son followed with an embarrassed air, and remained standing in the door-way: he divined that his father was about to play some rascally trick.

The Duke unfolded the account, and although he was accustomed to the most extravagant charges, he had never before seen anything like this; for mine host of the Golden Fox had reckoned his night's lodging, supper, etc. at five hundred francs.

Duke Ferdinand said nothing, but, quietly

taking the purse from the hand of Josselin, who was usually the paymaster, he counted out upon the round oak-table long rows of shining gold pieces, far exceeding in value the sum demanded of him.

“Will you ask the Mayor of the city to step here an instant?” said he to Harry, without, however, interrupting his occupation. “I have something to say to him?”

Harry hastily left the room.

The Duke counted and counted, the sum grew larger and larger, and the embarrassment of the old man, who could not conceive what his illustrious guest intended to do with such a heap of gold, increased proportionally.

After the lapse of about fifteen minutes, Harry entered with the Mayor, who bowed deeply.

The Duke assumed an air of command, and said: “You will receive from us, Sir Mayor, the sum of two thousand francs, which is destined for the dowry of a poor maiden belonging to this parish, if she will consent to fulfil the only condition we shall name: the money is hers, but she must pay out of it to Julian

Bertram, landlord of the Golden Fox, the expenses of four persons for one night's lodging. Count them up yourself, Mayor, the utmost that beds and supper for four very moderate men can amount to, and then deduct the sum — from twelve to fourteen francs — from this pile of gold, and give it to our worthy host of the Fox. Such, sir, is the will of Ferdinand of Orleans!"

Bertram felt as if he could sink into the earth with shame. The Mayor bowed, and respectfully asked: "Will your Highness have the kindness to mention the name of the fortunate maiden who is to receive so rich a gift at your royal hand?"

"Certainly, Mayor; the maiden is good, pretty, and industrious; her name is Juliet D——, and she is the niece of a wheelwright in the nearest village. If you wish to know more, you must ask Mr. Harry Bertram; his beaming eyes will tell you that he is well acquainted with the pretty bride and the happy groom. I hope there may be no further obstacle in the way of the happy couple, for they now stand under my own especial protection."

Harry could scarcely find words to express his fervent gratitude, while the old man sought a refuge from his confusion in a hasty retreat.

The Duke escaped all further thanks by leaping into his carriage, and giving orders to drive off at once. His parting salutation was most gracious and friendly. The two reckonings, honest Frank's and the disappointed landlord's, afforded the Prince and his companion infinite entertainment during the remainder of their journey, and were never afterwards recalled to memory without awakening the most lively and amusing recollections.

The Mayor paid the angry landlord fourteen francs. Harry and Juliet were soon after married, and were as happy as the good prince could wish them.

Whether old Bertram ever again asked five hundred francs for 'tea and a night's lodging, is unknown to me, but I doubt it very much; for after the scene we have just described, which soon became known to every man, woman, and child in the town, it was long before he dared to venture into the streets until after nightfall, because all the boys mocked

and derided him ; they even came daily and sang the following song under his window :—

“ Golden Fox,
Sly old Fox,
Were you bit,
Were you hit,
When you got, for tea and bed,
Only fourteen francs a head ?
Far too little, hero bold !
Vain your tricks : the seller ’s sold ! ”

FILIAL LOVE.

A LEGEND.



CHAPTER I.

THE OFFER.

It was a warm, sunshiny day in the month of June. Near a little village among the hills stood a wide-spreading linden, under which the village youth were dancing and otherwise amusing themselves, for it was a holiday. The shrill tones of the bagpipe mingled with the rich, full notes of the bugle ; but the young people cared little for the discordant sounds, and danced merrily on.

Some fifty paces from the gay company, and apart from the remaining houses in the village, stood a small cottage. It was surrounded by a little garden, and before the door was a white-pine bench, over which waved a blooming acacia, making a kind of arbor. On the bench sat a tolerably stout-looking man,

unoccupied, and apparently an unsympathizing spectator of all that was passing around him. But alas! the poor man could see nothing, for he had lost the use of his eyes, and sat absorbed in the melancholy consideration of the misfortune which had rendered him as helpless as a child. On a stool at his feet sat a little girl of about thirteen years of age. She was sewing, but from time to time laid her work aside and stroked the blind man's hand. Finally she asked, in low and gentle tones: "Are you well protected, father, from the sun's hot rays?"

"I am very comfortable, Erna!" replied he. But after a short pause he added, somewhat bitterly: "Do you hear the music? Child, go down and dance with the others. You should be where youth and joy prevail. I will not deprive you of every pleasure in life; it is enough that I must renounce them all."

"Let me stay with you, father," said the child, caressingly; "I do not care to dance."

"But you used to care for it, and you only remain here on my account," replied he, hastily. "Go; I will not have the people saying

that my misfortune has deprived you of every youthful enjoyment!"

"O father, no one says that!" continued she, imploringly. "I would go, but I am sure I should find no pleasure there, for my friend Minnie is absent."

"Where is she then?"

"She has gone with her father among the hills in search of an herb which only springs up on St. John's day, and soon after sinks back into the earth. Her mother needs the herb, for it is said to bring sleep, and Minnie's mother has been able to sleep but very little since she lost her infant boy."

Berthold sighed and said: "Her case is like mine, in so far that I too enjoy but very little repose; but lead me in, Erna, the air grows cool!"

The child carefully guided her father into the tiny sitting-room, whose windows were wreathed with grape-vines and ivy. He seated himself in a deep arm-chair, called his little dog to his side, and said in gentler tones: "Bring me my broth, child!"

Erna hastened out, and soon returned with

the nourishing food. When the blind man had satisfied his hunger, he took his daughter's hand and said: "Do not be vexed, my child, when I sometimes seem hasty, and even unkind, towards you; my misfortune always appears to me so unutterably heavy when I hear the others rejoicing, and know that my whole life must be passed in idleness and privation."

"O, all may yet be well," said Erna, consolingly; "nothing is impossible to God!"

"Leave me now, child; I am tired, and wish to sleep a little."

Erna stepped to the front door, and looked out over the landscape. The sun had gone down, and all was still except the solemn tolling of the evening bells. Erna folded her hands, and fervently prayed to God that he would restore her father's sight.

When she had concluded, she looked up and saw a man and a young girl descending the hills; the girl waved her handkerchief, and hastened towards the cottage.

"Is it you, Minnie? and did you find the herb?"

"Certainly; do you not see the dark-blue blossoms?" replied Minnie. "I will make a tea of them which will quiet mother's nerves, so that she may again sleep soundly as before."

"I will go up the hill early to-morrow morning," said Erna; "my father also desires such a plant. Tell me, are they hard to find?"

"O yes! we had nearly given up all hope of finding any, when I suddenly saw this one growing by the stone bridge; but only this one, and I know not if there be any more."

"O, if I only thought I could find one now," cried Erna, "I would go and return before my father awakes."

"Do not trouble yourself," replied Minnie, good-naturedly, "I will stay with your father, and will lead him about everywhere; he likes me, and I will remain until you return."

"Will you promise me that?"

"I here pledge you my hand that I will remain months, if necessary!" continued Minnie, laughing.

"That would indeed be a strange necessity," thought Erna, who then continued

aloud: "You know where to find bread and coffee; and if I should really have trouble in finding the plant, and should not return until after midday, you must set the oatmeal and the remains of the mutton over the fire."

"I will willingly do so, have no fear. But now I must hurry home, for father, who went by the footpath, will have told of our success, and mother will be anxious to see me."

The friends parted, and Erna re-entered the house.

Early the next morning she was ready to set out on her journey; she filled her little pocket with bread and fruit, and courageously departed for the stone bridge. Nearly all the villagers were still asleep, but the sun rose early, and his steady beams illumined the path of the solitary child.

Bright dew-drops shone upon the grasses and flowers, and the larks sang so gayly that even Erna felt quite joyous, and hastened on her way warbling a little song. She soon reached the stone bridge, and busily began her search, but in vain; no plant with green leaves and dark-blue blossoms met her view. After

the lapse of several hours, she sat down upon the grass, and drew forth her little slice of bread. At that moment, Erna saw an old woman leaning on a crutch, coming towards her; the ancient dame seemed to walk with considerable difficulty, and, when quite near Erna, stopped and said: "Will you give me a piece of your bread, child?"

"Willingly," replied Erna, dividing her bread into two equal portions, of which she gave one to the stranger, saying: "I wish I could give you more, but I shall probably be obliged to remain here myself until evening."

"And why so?" asked the old woman, comfortably seating herself upon the grass, and eating her bread with evident appetite.

"O, I am looking for the blue-flowered St. John's-wort."

"Which people say brings sleep?"

"Yes, my good woman."

"And for whom then?"

"For my poor, unhappy father, who has lost his eyesight."

"But, child, the plant will not restore his sight."

“ O, I know that but too well. Indeed, if I could find anything possessing that power, I would go to the end of the world for it, even if I had to leave my life behind.”

“ You seem to be a good daughter; but it is easier to talk of dying than to do so in reality.”

“ Nevertheless, I think I would not shun the most severe trials, if I could only render my dear father happy and well again ! ”

The old woman rose and said: “ Come with me, child, and I will help you to find the St. John’s-wort.”

Erna followed the crippled dame, who made her way through bushes and brambles, carefully searching on all sides, until at length she suddenly cried: “ There is one ! Do you see it, child ? Stoop down and gather it ! ”

Erna bent down towards the plant ; but as she was eagerly grasping it, the old woman laid her hand upon the child’s head and murmured a few unintelligible words.

Erna looked up bewildered, her eyelids drooped, and she fell into a deep sleep.

The old woman clapped her hands three times, the earth opened at her feet, and a

snow-white bed, hung round with wreaths of roses, ascended through the cleft. Two elves with rose-colored wings followed, and approached the sleeping Erna.

“Lift the child gently, and bear her to my kingdom,” said the old woman, again clapping her hands. Then her own gray dress and ugly mask fell to the ground, and a lovely lady in a robe of silver gauze, with a branch of lilies in her hand, stood upon the grassy bank.

She stepped to the head of the bed on which Erna lay sleeping, the two elves knelt at her feet; she lifted her lily wand, a faint strain of sweet music floated through the air, and all rose softly towards the clouds.

When Erna awoke, she was so surprised at all around her that she rubbed her eyes in astonishment, and fancied she must be dreaming. She still lay upon the snow-white bed, over which waved a canopy of lilies, roses, and hyacinths. Among the branches flitted beautiful birds, whose songs were so charming that Erna was enraptured, and folded her hands to listen. The warbling of the birds was ac-

accompanied by the harmonious tinkling of innumerable little silver bells half hidden among the leaves.

“O heavens! where can I be?” cried Erna, half rising from the bed.

The blooming branches parted, and the fairy queen entered, saying with a gentle voice to the astonished maiden: “I am the queen of the fairies, and I have long watched over you. I saw the care and love which you bestowed upon your poor father, and heard the fervent prayer which you addressed to Heaven. Only a few hours since, I heard you say that no sacrifice would be too great to offer for the restoration of your father’s sight, and that you would even be willing to lay down your life for him. Is this indeed true?”

“O gracious queen!” cried Erna, sinking upon her knees, “tell me, is there any possibility of aiding him?”

“There is one thing, my child, which would avail; but however great my power may be, I cannot procure it for you; it can only be won through sacrifice and self-denial. Tell me, do you feel strong enough to suffer everything?”

“ Everything, if I alone am to suffer ! ” cried Erna.

“ You alone,” replied the fairy ; “ and my aid will not be wanting if you show yourself worthy of it. Listen then. There is a place which I may not name to you, a narrow valley amid the hills, containing a beautiful fountain springing from a marble basin ; the water is of a bright rose-color, and a few drops suffice to restore sight to the blind. I will give you a guide to lead you to the valley ; but the distance is very great, and you will meet with many difficulties : faith and courage alone can overcome them. Here is a little silver tablet covered with spots of rust and verdigris. At the end of each day during which you have been good and obedient, some of the spots will pass away, and every good thought will aid in rendering the silver tablet clearer and brighter. But, on the other hand, every expression of ill-temper or anger, of impatience or selfishness, will add new and darker stains, as will also all tears springing not from the pure sources of love, longing, or compassion. When the last spot has vanished, you will be at your

journey's end; but no power can bring you there before, and the way back is very easy."

"O, I will willingly go!" cried Erna. "God will protect me! But who will take care of my dear father?"

"Minnie has promised you to remain months, if necessary. It is true the promise was made in jest, but it will not be the less truly kept. I will myself seek to console your father for your absence. My elves will now show you the glories of my kingdom; but when you lie down to rest this evening, you must take leave of all the beauty you have seen, for you will awake to-morrow morning again upon the earth, and in the exact spot where you went to sleep. You must then cross to the other side of the hill, whither my messenger will guide you."

Erna fell upon her knees and thankfully kissed the fairy-queen's hand. The good elf graciously raised her and said: "Do not thank me too soon! You are not yet at the goal; the way is long, and the sacrifices great; if you fail, and lose your patience or endurance, no one can aid you. But now you must survey my kingdom."

She took Erna's hand and led her from the bower.

A cry of delight escaped the child's lips as her eyes fell upon the beauty around her. The little paths leading through the groves and gardens were all strewn with gold-dust mingled with diamonds. The fruits on the trees were partially such as Erna had never before seen, such as figs, bananas, oranges, and pomegranates, and partially of colored crystal and precious stones.

Parrots with bright top-knots and pleasant voices (unlike those of ordinary parrots) flitted from branch to branch. Humming-birds of all colors stretched out their little necks and long bills inquiringly toward the birds of paradise sitting on the tree-tops, and filling the whole air with melodious songs. Little grottos, with crystal walls and mossy floors, offered quiet and cool retreats, while sparkling fountains, pouring from white marble basins, bathed the feet of innumerable singing birds which were sporting about the clear and shining waters.

"Does it please you?" asked the good-natured fairy, smiling at Erna's wonder.

The child scarcely ventured to breathe, fearing to lose any of the marvellous sights which met her delighted gaze.

“ You may go and taste the fruit, and fill your pockets with it, in return for the bread you gave me when you took me for an old woman.”

Erna did as she was bidden; and when she had satisfied her hunger and filled her pockets, they continued their way.

They came at length to a smooth, green lawn, encircled by a blooming hedge, emitting a delightful perfume. On the green danced a multitude of fairies, waving wreaths of flowers, and singing gay songs.

Erna gazed in speechless delight upon their graceful forms, until finally the fairy-queen, taking her by the hand, led her back to the little bower in which she had first awakened in fairy-land. When Erna had laid her down to rest upon the little bed, the fairy said: “ Sleep well, my child, we will protect thee ! ” She then touched the maiden with her lily wand, and Erna fell into a deep slumber.

The darkness of night had meanwhile cov-

ered the earth, and Erna's father sat in his little room sorrowing over the prolonged absence of his child.

"Be consoled, Father Berthold," said Minnie, taking his hand. "Erna will soon return; the moon is up, and will enlighten her pathway. The distance is great, and the plant which you desired very hard to find."

"O, how I wish I had never expressed a desire for it!" groaned the blind man. "Who knows what evil may have befallen my poor child!"

"Do not fear; Erna knows the neighborhood well, and God always takes care of good children."

"That is true!" said Berthold, somewhat consoled.

"And see!" continued Minnie gayly; "it is said that good little fairies dwell on the hill-tops, and they may perhaps aid Erna in finding many precious plants wherewith to surprise you!"

"You are a dear, good girl, Minnie!" said the blind man, smiling; "but now go and bring me my supper."

Minnie went. Scarcely had she left the room when the walls opened, and light beamed for an instant upon the darkened eyes of the invalid. He saw a lovely figure floating before him, and heard a gentle voice saying: "Wait patiently until Erna returns! You will see her again, but do not ask when. It is love to you which now parts her from your side."

A moment after, Berthold's eyes again closed in darkness, but the light had descended into his heart.

Minnie brought his supper; the blind man seized her hand, and gently asked: "Will you remain with me, child, until Erna returns? I have just had news of her, but it will probably be a long time before she again enters her home."

Minnie gazed on the blind man in astonishment, but asked no questions. After a pause, she said: "I will remain with you; I promised Erna to do so. My parents have my sisters, and do not need my aid."

And Minnie remained.

CHAPTER II.

THE TRIAL.

WHEN Erna again opened her eyes, a rosy streak in the east announced the dawn. She lay on a mossy bank beside the stone bridge where she had on the previous day met the old woman. The child would have thought it all a dream, had it not been for a silver tablet hanging round her neck.

Erna rose quickly and said to herself: "Courage, then, for there is a way to render my father well and happy. O, where can the guide be which is to lead me to the blessed fountain?"

At that moment she heard a faint twittering; she looked up and perceived a snow-white dove sitting on a neighboring branch. The bird sang:—

“Follow me !
Day and night
Lead I thee,
Still aright !

“Never fear,
For thy friend
Will be near,
To the end !”

The dove flew three times round the maiden's head, and then winged its way to the top of the hill.

Erna cast a last look toward her home, now brightened by the rays of the morning sun. “Farewell, father !” whispered she, deeply moved, as she waved a long adieu to her native village. The child turned and followed her guide, which rapidly descended into the opposite valley.

She passed through green meadows, and luxuriant grain-fields, with pleasant villages on either hand. Towards midday, however, the sun shone down oppressively upon Erna's unprotected head. Tired and hungry, she seated herself upon the grass, and for the first time recollected that she had nothing to eat.





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ERNA AND THE DOVE

Remembering the fairy fruit, she put her hand in her pocket, but found nothing but glittering stones. Although she would have much preferred a slice of brown bread, not a word of complaint passed her lips; on the contrary, she patiently said to herself: "I will rest a moment, and then seek some village, where surely no one will deny me a piece of bread."

The dove alighted on her shoulder, hid its head under its wing, and slept.

Both rested thus during a half-hour. Erna then arose, and the dove recommenced its flight. A village was soon reached, the little traveller approached the first house, and begged a woman, who sat in the door-way spinning, for some bread.

The young woman cheerfully rose, opened a closet, and while she spread a slice of brown bread with fresh butter, said: "Where is your home, little girl?"

"On the other side of the hill," replied Erna, receiving the bread with a thankful glance.

"Poor child! you must have walked at least nine hours; do not your feet hurt you?"

"O, not much, dear lady! the road is good, and I am strong and healthy."

“ And how far have you yet to go ? ”

“ Perhaps very far, and perhaps I may soon be able to return.”

“ You are then seeking some one ? ”

Erna looked embarrassed, but finally said :
“ O yes, I seek much ! ”

“ God be with you, poor child ! ” continued the kind-hearted woman ; “ I understand that you cannot or ought not to tell me the aim of your journey, but I see drops of blood on your white stockings ; if your feet are sore, you may come in and remain with us until they are quite well again.”

“ I thank you, but I cannot stay ! ” said Erna, offering the good woman her little hand.

The latter wrapped up a few slices of bread and meat, which she placed in the child’s pocket, and then accompanied her to the garden gate, where they parted.

“ O, I do not get on so badly,” thought Erna, rejoiced at this kind reception ; but a moment after, she stumbled and nearly fell ; her feet were very sore, and burned like fire.

The dove flew down from its station on a linden, and gently cooed as it led the way.

Towards evening, Erna saw a noble castle standing before her, with every pane in the lofty windows gilded by the rays of the setting sun.

From the castle gate issued a brilliant train of knights and dames on horseback. A beautiful lady on a snow-white steed led the procession; she wore a blue velvet habit, and a cap adorned with feathers and diamonds.

Erna looked up in amazement, but at the same moment perceived a woman lying in the middle of the road, and in evident danger of being trampled on by the train of riders, as they did not seem to have noticed her.

Erna knelt at her side, and, lifting her hands imploringly toward the lady, cried: "O help, noble lady! the poor woman is dying!"

"What does the girl want?" cried the lady to one of the gentlemen.

The latter said, roughly: "Stand aside, beggar! you are in our way!"

Poor Erna strove to lift the peasant-woman's heavy body, but in vain; the weight was too great, and her arms fell powerless at her side.

“Will you get out of the way?” repeated the horseman.

“I cannot, sir! Let one of your people dismount and aid me to bear away this poor woman; I cannot lift her without assistance.”

The lady laughed aloud, urged her horse forward, and came rapidly toward Erna and the still unconscious peasant.

Erna uttered a loud cry of horror when she saw the whole troop coming down upon her; she raised her eyes to heaven, extended her arms over the helpless form of the fainting woman, and courageously awaited her fate.

The wild troop came galloping on, but not a single hoof touched the child, who still leaned trembling and exhausted over the peasant-woman. When she again raised her eyes, equestrians, peasant, and castle had all vanished, and she lay upon a grassy bank, with the sun quietly sinking beneath the horizon.

“It was only a trial!” said she to herself; and a look upon her silver tablet convinced her that she had well endured the test, for lo! one side showed a diminished number of stains, and began to look quite bright and shining.

It soon became too dark to proceed. Erna could no longer see the dove, and she was besides so weary, that she felt rest to be absolutely necessary. No village was in sight, not even the faintest light to show the vicinity of a dwelling.

“I will stay here and try to sleep!” said the lonely girl to herself; “the air is mild, and will do me no harm!”

When Erna had finished her evening prayer, she fearlessly laid her down to rest, and slept soundly. The dove watched her slumbers for a short time, and then, hiding its little head under its downy wing, followed her example.

The next morning the sun shone bright and clear upon Erna’s mossy couch; she rose, and was soon ready to proceed.

Meadows, fields, and villages bordered the way as before, and appeared in endless succession.

Toward noon, when the heat of the sun had forced Erna to take a little rest, she perceived that the whole sky was rapidly being obscured by heavy, black clouds. A violent wind soon followed, whirling leaves and dust high into

the air. The birds anxiously sought the shelter of their little nests.

Erna also looked about her for a place of safety, but the nearest village was still a mile distant, and the storm seemed momentarily about to burst upon her defenceless head.

Erna hurried on; the faithful dove flew rapidly before her; but the village seemed as far distant as ever, although the poor child had long before been able to distinguish its red-tiled roofs amid the green foliage of the trees.

Great drops of rain fell upon Erna's heated face; she tied her kerchief over her head and hastened on; the thunder rolled, and the lightning flashed through the dark vault of the heavens. Erna gazed sadly and timidly toward the place where she had seen the village, but she must have lost her way, for nothing was visible but a dark wood and some desolate fields. The child cried loudly for help, but no sound save the crashing of the thunder and the whistling of the wind fell upon her ears. She turned to the right, and then to the left, but the red tiles had all vanished.

The rain poured in torrents; Erna's clothes

were dripping, and her long hair clung to her temples, and fell in wet and clammy masses over her shoulders. She thought she must have been running for hours.

“ Ah! how comfortable and pleasant must it now be at home!” thought she. But then the image of her blind father entered her mind, and gave her renewed strength and endurance.

“ But how fortunate it is,” continued she to herself, “ that I know you, dear, good father, to be safe and sound in our own little house! Surely, Minnie will take good care of you, and you will know that we are one day to meet again!”

She had not uttered one word aloud, but, arresting her fruitless course, she had taken the poor, wet dove into her hands to warm and dry it, when lo! the little creature, which had not spoken a word since its first song, began to warble:—

“ Take courage, child!
The storm is wild,
But joy will come at last!
And every trace
Of grief efface,
'Mid smiles at dangers past!”

"Dear little comforter!" said Erna, pressing the wonderful bird to her bosom. She then patiently sat down upon the grass to await whatever might befall.

The storm gradually ceased, the sky became clear, and Erna again perceived the red roofs of the village rising behind a neighboring grove of willows. She joyfully rose, and, approaching the first house, knocked gently at the door, for the poor child was tired and hungry, and her clothes were still dripping with the rain.

"Who is there?" asked a harsh voice.

Erna timidly entered, and found herself in a wide hall, which looked desolate and uninviting. A man of forbidding aspect came towards her, and asked her what she wanted.

"Ah, sir! I was out in the storm, and have come to ask permission to dry my clothes."

"Where do you come from, girl?" asked the man.

"O, very far from here, good man; my home is on the other side of the mountain."

"And what do you want?"

"Nothing but a shelter until I can dry my clothes," was the timid answer. "In one hour I must again depart!"

“ You are nothing but a worthless vagabond of a beggar ! ” cried the man, roughly. “ But take care ! I am the constable of the place, and if you dare to repeat your demand to any one else in the village, I will put you into the town-house, and teach you how to beg again. Off with you ! we have plenty such as you are among us, and need no foreign importations ! ”

“ O, I am so tired that I can go no farther ! ” said Erna, despairingly.

“ Have you a mind to rest in the town-house, hey ? ” angrily cried the man.

Erna stretched out her hands imploringly, but in vain ; she was forced to continue her journey without bread and without rest.

As she came near the end of the village, she saw a young girl sitting and sewing in an open door-way. She was singing a lullaby, and at the same time rocking a cradle with her foot. On the lower limb of a fruit-tree growing near the house sat a boy of about six years old, who was gathering pears. Every now and then he would attract his sister's attention by throwing a pear at her feet, when she would look up and playfully threaten him

with her finger, a gesture which seemed to afford the lively boy endless amusement.

Erna stood a few moments gazing upon this charming scene, and then, raising her hands, held them out beseechingly towards the kind-looking little girl.

“What is the matter, poor child?” compassionately asked the girl. “Your clothes are all wet, and you look pale and weary!”

“Ah, I am very tired!” cried Erna. “O, be pitiful, and grant me a few moments’ rest and a little bread! I will not trouble you long.”

“Come here, child! I will give you something to eat, and while I dry your clothes at the fire, you can put on a suit of mine, which it is true will be rather long and loose for you, but never mind that!”

The proposition was at once accepted. The kind girl, whose name was Hannah, dressed Erna in a green woollen gown and a crimson apron, and then, hanging the wet garments before the fire, said: “You look lovely now, and while your broth is cooking, we will go to the door and rock Johnny, for you must know that my parents are absent

to-day, and have left me to keep house. Christopher," cried she to the little pear-gatherer, "come down and bring father's arm-chair out here for the little girl to sit in; the sun is still warm, and Erna can rest herself in the door-way with us."

"O how good you are, Hannah!" cried Erna, gratefully.

The chair was brought, the tired child rested her weary limbs upon the soft cushions, and eagerly ate the savory broth and smoking potatoes which were soon placed before her.

Christopher, who had meanwhile been examining Erna intently, finally produced a little basket of pears, and said: "Put some in your pocket and take them with you; Christopher will willingly give them to you."

He therefore turned her pockets upside down, and lo! the stone fruits rolled out.

"O, what pretty glass!" cried the brother and sister.

Erna took a fig made of some dark-blue stone, and, giving it to Hannah, said: "Take this in return for the kindness you have bestowed upon me."

“O, do not speak of that!” said Hannah; “I only did what every one should do to a fellow-creature!”

“Well, then, keep it as a remembrance from me!” begged Erna.

“O yes, I will willingly do that!”

“And if you should ever be in want,” continued Erna, “you must try to sell it, for I believe it to be worth more than either of us comprehend.”

Hannah laughed incredulously, but said nothing, and placed the blue fig in a little box in which she kept all her treasures,—a chain with a silver locket, and a black-morocco prayer-book.

Johnny then awoke, and making friends with Erna, who took him in her arms, gayly laughed as she danced him up and down. Erna by this time felt perfectly at home, and had almost forgotten her journey, when the village-clock struck five. She quickly rose, laid Johnny in his cradle, offered Hannah her hand, and said: “Farewell! God bless you for the refreshment which you have bestowed upon me!”

“O, do not go yet!” begged Hannah; “the storm may return during the night, and you will then be alone and without shelter.”

Erna hesitated; she thought of all the hardships and anxiety she had endured during the morning, but the image of her blind father rose in her mind and encouraged her to proceed, for she could still make use of the remaining hours of the day in pursuing her journey, and thus shorten the time necessary for the attainment of her object.

“I must go, dear Hannah; but I will visit you on my return, and perhaps beg your good mother for a night’s lodging!”

“Do so,” replied Hannah, who quickly wrapped up a little parcel of bread and cheese, which she placed in Erna’s pocket, and then took as tender a leave of her new friend as if they had known each other for years. Christopher loaded Erna with as many pears as she could carry, and accompanied her to the limits of the village.

Erna felt quite refreshed, and walked on during several hours; for the days in that latitude are very long in June.

Late in the evening she reached a little town, whose usually quiet streets were enlivened by the presence of many strangers, attracted thither by the annual fair, and by the innumerable booths which had been erected for the display of gay stuffs, kerchiefs, ribbons, cakes, candies, &c.

Erna found much difficulty in making her way through the crowd, until she finally stopped before a shop where handsomely dressed dolls and other toys were exposed for sale.

She looked without envy upon the children who were issuing from the gay store, with their hands full of presents bestowed on them by their parents; she rejoiced in their bright faces and joyful demeanor.

"What is the child gaping at?" suddenly asked the store-keeper, a tall, thin man, with a sharp voice.

Erna blushed, and turned to depart.

"What! not even an answer?" cried the man, seizing her by the shoulder. "Is that a proper way for such a chit to treat an old man?"

"I did not know what to say," replied

Erna, "and as my standing here seemed to annoy you, I concluded to go away!"

"Concluded to go away! Just listen to the saucy little thing! How she talks! One may endure such behavior from a lady, but by no means from such a little tattered beggar-girl!"

Erna looked sadly down upon her clothes. The man was right; she did look forlorn, for the brambles through which she had been forced to make her way had torn her clothes in many places, and the rain had nearly washed all the color from her brown stuff dress.

"What is the matter here?" asked the deep bass voice of a man wearing the uniform of the police, whose hard features gave evidence that he was no mild official.

"Look for yourself, Mr. Joost, and you will see that I was right in seizing upon this little personage! She has been standing here half an hour ogling my dolls, bestowing her especial countenance upon that lady in the crimson satin, and looking so affectionately upon my wares that I was really afraid to turn my back, for no one can know what such little vagabonds may do!"

Erna blushed; the poor child understood Master Jack's insinuation, and, pressing her hand to her eyes, sighed deeply.

"Come, come, child! don't cry," said Mr. Joost; "no one can hurt you if you have only been gazing upon those silly dollies; let me search your pockets, and if I find nothing suspicious there, you may go."

Erna immediately offered her pockets for inspection. Master Jack held a lamp to facilitate the operation, and looked highly pleased when the policeman drew forth the glittering stone fruit.

"What kind of toys do you call these, Miss?" asked Joost, sharply.

Erna grew pale, and knew not what to say.

"Hi! hi! we have it now!" laughed Master Jack.

"Will you be quiet?" said Joost to the store-keeper; "the glass bullets do not belong to you, and you have no business to meddle in what does not concern you! As for you, child, you must follow me to the police-office, where you shall have a hearing."

"O good sir!" implored Erna, "I swear to you that the stones were given to me."

“ You must prove that at the office ; this is not the place for such oaths.”

“ Ah ! you will surely be merciful, and not shut me up with criminals !”

“ Silly stuff ! If you think yourself so innocent, so much the better for you ; but now march along with me ! Where is your passport ?”

“ Good sir, I have no passport !” cried Erna, weeping.

“ Well, what did I tell you, Mr. Joost ?” grinned the shopkeeper.

“ Take care of yourself, and of your own doll faces, Master Jack ; I am quite sufficient to take care of the child.”

So saying, he seized Erna’s hand and led her along with him.

Although it was quite late, yet a crowd of curious persons assembled round the poor, weeping girl, who tightly pressed her hands over her eyes, and broke out into loud sobs, when she heard a voice in the crowd say : “ So young, and already a thief !” This was the hardest trial of all.

The police-office, a great gloomy building,

was finally reached. Erna followed the servant of the law into a little side-room, where he said to her: "Out of regard to your youth, and that you may not pass the night in bad company, I will leave you here, alone. Here is a piece of bread and a pitcher of water for your supper. You will have a hearing early to-morrow morning, and if you can prove your innocence, you may go free."

"O, but the shame will always cling to me!" wept Erna.

"Don't be silly, child, and learn prudence for the future; what can such a little thing as you be doing in a strange city without a passport?"

"O, you do not know why I left my home!" wept the forsaken girl.

"You must tell that to the judge to-morrow; but now you must go to sleep, for it is nearly ten o'clock."

The man then extinguished the light, and left Erna alone in the dark cell; she felt about with her hands until she found the little straw pallet which lay in the corner of the room. Although she was very weary and very sor-

rowful, she did not forget her prayers ; on the contrary, she said them with redoubled fervor, for experience had already taught her that nothing can so relieve an oppressed spirit as humble prayer.

She had scarcely closed her eyes when she heard a strange whispering round her bed ; but she was too tired to feel curious, and was soon fast asleep. She dreamed that the walls of her prison opened, that the darkness was all tinged with rosy light, and that, instead of straw, she slept upon a bed of roses and lilies. Soft melodies floated round her, and so soothed the poor, forsaken child, that her lips parted in a happy smile. Erna furthermore saw in her dream how the fairy-queen stepped out of a white lily-bell and approached her bed. She felt a light kiss upon her brow, and then heard a gentle voice saying : “ Be patient, the time for rest is at hand ! ”

Then two elves lifted, as before, the maiden’s couch from the earth, and rose with it towards the clouds. The city lay far below, still shrouded in darkness, and vale and hill rapidly vanished from Erna’s view.

Erna fancied all this to be merely a dream, but her first glance, when she awoke in the morning, convinced her of her mistake. She lay upon a soft mossy bank at the foot of a mountain, over whose summit the morning sun was just rising.

Town, prison, and judge had all vanished, and with them the child's anxiety. She courageously began to ascend the mountain, the dove, as usual, flying on before.

The way soon became wearisome and difficult; the steep rocks rose so precipitously, that Erna was often forced to cling to them with both hands to keep herself from falling. The loose stones frequently rolled away from beneath her feet, thus greatly increasing the difficulty of the ascent.

On the mountain-side were a few bushes bearing sloes and haws, and here and there a tuft of grass forced its way through the clefts; but the vegetation was all yellow, and apparently scorched with the heat of the sun. And yet this was hard to imagine, for a cold and cutting wind was blowing over Erna's pathway.

No sound of life, not even the twittering of

a bird, was to be heard. Erna tried to sing a simple song, but the sharp wind soon impeded her utterance, and she was forced to pursue her way in silence.

No village, no house, not even the tiniest cabin, met her view. Nevertheless, she felt no fear, and gazed from time to time on the silver tablet hanging round her neck. O how many stains had vanished! But how many still remained upon the bright surface!

Toward noon she entered a deep ravine, and surely now had no cause to complain of the excessive quiet, for the loud roaring of a mountain stream almost deafened her. The dark water forced its way among the rocks, and in its passage tore away large stones, rootless bushes, and broken limbs which had fallen from the trees.

The rocks were so piled overhead that the wild pass was quite dark. Erna longed to hasten through it, but the dove seemed inclined to rest in this very spot, and, flying to a leafless trunk, drew in its little feet and went to sleep.

Erna crept into a narrow grotto which the

hand of Nature had formed among the rocks. She searched her pockets, and found some of the bread and pears which Hannah and Christopher had given her. She hastily demolished this scanty meal, and then looked up anxiously toward the dove, for she longed to continue her journey.

But the dove still slept; Erna rose, went first to the right and then to the left, recommenced the steep ascent, and even went a few steps backward, — all in vain, the bird did not stir.

Hour after hour passed away; Erna still stood upon the same spot, anxiously awaiting her guide's movements.

She finally called her little friend by every term of human endearment; she tried to climb up the leafless tree that she might stroke its tender wings, but the height was too great, and she was forced to abandon the attempt.

At length, after one hot tear after another had, almost unconsciously to herself, rolled down Erna's cheeks, the dove awoke.

"O, come down, dear little dove, and let us journey on!" cried the child.

The dove suddenly shuddered, gave a mournful cry, and flew hastily down into Erna's bosom, where it hid its head under its wing, and trembled so violently that its feathers shook as if ruffled by a sudden storm.

The child looked up and saw a great bird of prey circling at no great distance above her head, and glaring down upon her with its great yellow eyes.

In an agony of fear she placed one hand over the trembling bird, while she raised the other as if to shield herself from the eagle, which ever approached nearer and nearer to its defenceless prey.

Erna closed her eyes in horror, but still clung to the dove, with which the creature would probably have been satisfied, bending her body so as completely to protect it.

The sound of an arrow whizzing past her fell upon Erna's ear; a stifled cry, and a violent beating of the air, followed; she looked up and saw the huge bird, whose breast had been pierced by an arrow, fall into the stream, which rapidly bore away the dead body.

Erna looked in vain for her preserver, but could see no one.

The dove arose from her bosom, and flew on, softly cooing, before her.

They soon left the dark ravine and entered upon a wide plain, on which grew a little grass and heather, mingled with a few Northern trees. Amid the groves of firs and pines appeared an occasional cottage or peasant's hut; and, however miserable these dwellings might be, they were still human habitations, and filled poor Erna's heart with a most joyful sense of security.

Thus slowly passed the days, until Erna finally forgot to number them. She was no longer the blooming maiden introduced to our young readers at the commencement of our tale. Privation and hardship had rendered her thin and pale, and her step was now feeble and unsteady. Her blue eyes were often longingly turned towards heaven, and bitter tears flowed down her cheeks as she prayed: "O my good Heavenly Father, if I do not soon reach the goal, I shall not be able to rejoice in my father's recovery, for my strength is passing from me day by day!"

The poor child was one evening making her way through a thorny thicket; the brambles tore her clothes and hair, not sparing even her face and hands. She had scarcely tasted anything during the whole day, and was now quite rejoiced at finding a few blackberries growing on the bushes, satisfying at once both hunger and thirst.

But even these bushes soon ceased, and scarcely a green leaf was to be seen. The ground had become wet and spongy, and the waste seemed interminable. She often sank deep into the morass, from which she could only with the greatest difficulty extricate herself; but her patience never failed, and she was ever ready to renew her painful efforts.

Night came on. Every now and then a bright light would flash across the plain, and then vanish as unexpectedly as it had arisen. Erna fortunately remembered to have heard her father speak of *ignis fatui*, which are especially found in damp places, and which frequently lead travellers astray.

She took good care not to follow any of these deceitful guides, and was just about ly-

ing down on the damp earth rather than incur any further danger of sinking into the swamp during the darkness, when her eye suddenly fell upon a bright and steady light shining at a considerable distance before her.

She directed her steps toward it, and was delighted to find the character of the ground and surrounding landscape rapidly changing. Waving grain-fields soon bordered her way, the twittering of birds fell upon her ear, and — most melodious sound to the lonely traveller! — she heard at no great distance the barking of a dog.

All nature seemed again to have revived. Full of hope, she hastened on. She soon reached a high railing enclosing a beautiful garden. The gate was wide open, and she entered a broad avenue of tall trees, from whose branches hung innumerable colored lamps, throwing a light almost as brilliant as that of day.

The birds were singing as gayly, as if they were greeting the approach of a fresh spring morning.

The dove flew on through the enchanted

groves, until the pair finally came to a lofty castle of white marble rising from a terraced hill. A thousand lights were gleaming through the windows, and the portal was illuminated by torches burning with a singular blue flame.

Troops of servants in gay liveries passed before the astonished girl, but no one seemed to heed her presence, and no one asked her why she came. The dove flew through the lofty folding-doors, and tripped up the gilded balustrade. Erna timidly followed, but no one apparently observed her; and although many attendants, bearing fruits and sweetmeats on silver dishes, hastened past her, yet no one spoke to her.

She finally entered a vast hall, whose walls were covered with blue tapestry spangled with gold stars, whence innumerable wax lights gleamed upon the gay scene below.

Ladies and gentlemen were dancing in the interior of the hall. The long trains of rich brocade rustled, feathers waved, and diamonds glittered, while the breasts of nearly all the gentlemen were decorated with stars and orders.

Erna, dazzled by the unexpected brilliancy of the scene, closed her eyes, but she was no longer unobserved ; the noblest among the company approached her with deep reverences, and begged her in the most persuasive tones to remain with them.

Erna's eyes fell in embarrassment upon her ragged clothes, when lo ! they were no longer to be seen. A rich dress of embroidered silver gauze flowed down upon her weary limbs, and raising her hand to her head, she felt a diamond crown in her hair, while the little silver tablet had become a brilliant diamond cross.

But her heart beat anxiously, and almost against her will she yielded her little hand to one of the ladies who offered to be her guide, and who led her into another large room, in which stood a long table ornamented with flowers and covered with dainties whose name even was unknown to our simple Erna.

She sat down, and crystal vessels filled with tempting fruit were placed before her. In spite of her secret uneasiness, she was so faint with hunger that she reached forth her hand to help herself. But the dove which sat upon her

shoulder flapped its white wings against its sides, and sang:—

“Away! away!
Thou mayst not stay,
No rest canst thou find here!
Come, fly with me,
Thy guide I ’ll be,
For danger lurketh near!”

Erna resolutely pushed the dish aside, and refused to drink from the proffered glass of sparkling wine. She rose from her seat; the whole company surrounded her with flattering words, and persuasive invitations to partake of the pleasures offered to her thirsting spirit and weary little frame. Her heart beat, her cheeks burned; she turned to the right and then to the left, but saw no escape from the mysteriously sparkling eyes of the whole company which met her on every side.

To add to her confusion, she was almost deafened by a band of music, whose tones rose clearly and triumphantly above the general clamor. Erna felt that danger threatened, although she could not exactly tell how or where.

She thought no longer of her bodily wants, and resolved to fly. She broke through the throng, and hurried down the stairway; the assembled multitude called after her in strange, wild tones, and the ladies threateningly raised their white arms to impede her progress.

In the extremity of her terror, she pressed the silver tablet to her heart, and lo! the whole scene vanished. Castle, garden, music, and wax-tapers were all gone, and she stood alone in the moonlight, beside a fountain whose waters were tinged with the hues of the rose.

Near the fountain's brink knelt a winged elf, who caught some of the glittering rosy drops in a silver goblet, which he then placed in the child's hand, saying: "Receive the reward of your truth, self-sacrifice, and devoted filial love!"

Who can describe Erna's delight as she grasped the precious cup? But before she could utter a single word of thanks, she felt an unconquerable sense of weariness and faintness stealing over her; and closing her hand tightly round the goblet, she sank upon the grass, and fell into a deep slumber.

CHAPTER III.

THE REWARD.

WE must again lead our young reader to Erna's home.

When Erna re-opened her eyes, she thought she must have been dreaming, but a glance upon the silver goblet containing the healing waters, convinced her of the blessed reality. Round her neck hung the silver tablet, clear, smooth, and shining, without one stain of rust!

Erna hastily rose, for she thought she had a long journey to make before she could rejoin her father, and restore his happiness through her new-found treasure; but, wonderful to relate! she stood by the well-known stone bridge, with her feet upon the very bank where she had first seen the old woman.

Her father's cottage, her home, her all, lay

in the valley at her feet. The morning sun shone brightly over the landscape, and the matin bells called the faithful to prayer. Erna fell upon her knees, and prayed long and fervently.

With winged steps and a joyful heart, she hastened down into the valley; she no longer needed a guide, and the faithful dove had vanished.

Her heart beat loudly as she entered the little house. She stood a moment in the entry, and gazed through the half-open door. Her father was sitting by the window, breathing the fresh, pure air of the early morning; he leaned his head upon his hand, and sighed deeply.

"Is your seat quite comfortably arranged, Father Berthold?" asked Minnie, at the same moment handing him a cup of new milk.

"Put the cup down, child, I cannot drink!"

"But you have eaten so little since Erna went away, and she will surely scold me when she returns, and finds you so pale and thin!"

"Returns? Erna return!" repeated he with

a deep sigh ; “ child, do you really believe she will return ? ”

“ Why not ? You were also full of hope in the beginning, and when I questioned you, you used to smile mysteriously and say, ‘ Believe me, she will return. ’ ”

“ But many long weeks have passed since then, and my child is not yet here. O who knows in what abyss she may have perished, while I, her foolish father, suffered myself to be cajoled by a dream ! ”

At these words, great tears rolled from Berthold’s darkened eyes and fell upon his wasted hands.

Erna could no longer contain herself. She rushed into the room, and fell at her father’s feet. “ Here I am, dear father ! I live and bring you help ! O, all will be well now ! ”

“ Erna, my child ! my sweet child ! You live ! I have you once more ! I hold you in my arms ! All is indeed well now, and I feel that I can even be happy in my blindness if you are only with me ! ”

“ O father, you will see again ! you will certainly soon see your happy child, your Erna ! ”

The child was nearly beside herself with joy, but she did not the less gently and carefully bathe Berthold's eyes with the precious balm.

The father raised his hand to his eyes, as if blinded by excess of light; he thought at first he must be dreaming, for the darkness which had oppressed him for so many long years had vanished. He saw his child, the good Minnie, the woods and fields, and the blue, shining heavens. No words can paint his rapture.

"O my God! to what miracle am I to attribute my recovery?" asked Berthold, still lost in astonishment.

"After God, to thy child!" answered a gentle voice, and the fairy-queen, in all her beauty and glory, stood before the bewildered trio.

Erna bent her knee, and touched the perfumed garment of the lovely apparition with her lips. "O, not to me!" cried she. "Your aid, generous queen, next to God's, wrought the wonder!"

"You may believe so, if the thought gives pleasure to your modesty. And now let us part; you no longer need my protection, and we shall never meet again."

“ And the dove, the faithful guide ? ” asked Erna.

“ Was no other than myself, dear child ! I wished in person to guide, warn, and protect you. The fruits which you plucked in my kingdom are worth much more than you think, and if you sell them, they will restore all you have lost through the inaction forced upon your father by his long blindness. I know too, Erna, that your good heart will not permit Minnie’s kindness to go unrewarded, and that she will share with you this gift, as well as your present happiness ! ”

So saying, the fairy lifted her lily wand in token of benediction over the heads of the happy trio. They fell upon their knees, and watched the fairy’s car of rosy clouds drawn by two snow-white swans, until it had disappeared in the brightness of the shining firmament.

It was some time before Berthold and Minnie could recover from their astonishment ; and you may be sure that, when they did so, there was no end to the questions which Erna was called upon to answer. The child gave a lively account of her adventures, touching as

lightly as possible, however, upon her own sufferings.

Erna soon became more blooming than ever. The fairy fruits were sold to a jeweller in a neighboring town, who declared them to be most wonderful stones, and who paid so high a price for them that Berthold and his daughter were placed above want during the remainder of their lives ; and of course Minnie shared all with them.

The tiny cottage was replaced by a commodious, but simple country-house ; and although Berthold had become comparatively rich, he never lost his love for that useful labor which he had so long been forced to relinquish. He shared his superfluity with all the needy, and never forgot to be humble and pious.

Some wonderful blessing seemed to rest upon all Erna's labors, and good fortune attended her during the whole course of her life ; but although she frequently afterwards visited the stone bridge, she never again saw a fairy.

THE END.



